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Lifestyle
Beyond the spread of 'banig'
Across/A18
Tragedy strikes Kidlat's house
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Sports
No contest in NBA slam dunk

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Monday, February 16, 2004 • 34 pages / vol. 19 / no. 73

www.inq7.net

American troops back for war exercises

By Allan Macatuno and Tonette Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—At least 700 American troops, including 100 Marines based in Okinawa, arrived here on Sunday, a week before the Feb. 23 opening of the large-scale

CONTINUED A13

Inquirer now costs P18

FOR THE past three years, the Philippine Daily Inquirer has carried out various cost-cutting measures to keep the cover price (then) at P15. But top this period, however, the paper has already incurred by an even than 25 percent, jacking up production costs, particularly of imported paper.

The final P20 was sustained to deliver the same quality newspaper to readers, the company has decided to raise the newsstand cover price to P18 starting today. Issues from Monday to Sunday will have the same cover price.

mail feedback@inquirer.com.ph

GMA orders probe of Mindoro killings

By Madonna T. Virola
PDI Southern Luzon

"RUTHLESSNESS to service and not ranking matters [most to] me," was the message to Filipinos of the campaign flyers that Vice Mayor Joey Magsino of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, was supposed to distribute at a memorial candlelight of the visiting Lakas-CMD in the May 10 elections.

Magsino, a lawyer and former official of the militant League of Filipino Students and the Bagong Mamamayang Makabayan, did not get to distribute his campaign materials.

He and Bayan Muna district coordinator Leima Flores were shot dead on Feb. 13, several hours after they attended the campaign rally of President Macapagal-Arroyo, her running mate Sen. Noli de Castro and the senatorial candidates of the administration's K-4 coalition in Calapan City, the provincial capital.

Mr. Macapagal has condemned the killings.

"The President strongly condemns the slaying of the candidate in Mindoro and her companion and has instructed the government to conduct a thorough investigation immediately, find the murderers and identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice," the President's spokesperson Ignacio Bunye said on Feb. 14.

But two presidential candidates lashed out at Mr. Macapagal for the killings. Raul Roco, president-bearer of Alyansa ng Pagasa, said the series of election-related violence in the country showed a "breakdown of moral authority" in the Macapagal administration.

"Because of these unsolved bombings, violence will go down. In Brazil, we have lost already four journalists. In Bohol, there was an attempt on the governor's life plus two local government leaders," Roco said.

Opposition presidential candidate Sen. Nenita Lacson said the

CONTINUED A13

SC: We're not cowed by Poe's supporters

CHIEF government negotiator Silvestre Bello (center) and Luis Jalandoni, head of the communist-led National Democratic Front panel, sign the joint statement that put the peace process back on track, more than two years after the first talks collapsed.

FPJ says he will abide by decision

By Michael Lim, Christine V. Bagares and Christine O. Avendaño

ASSERTING its role as the last bulwark of democracy, the Supreme Court said yesterday that it was not at all cowed by supporters of actor Fernando Poe Jr., who had warned of civil unrest should the tribunal rule against the opposition presidential candidate.

"These kinds of threats do not in any way intimidate or unnerve the Supreme Court. Like deciding the FPJ case," said Deputy Court Administrator Ismael Khan.

But Poe yesterday pledged to abide by the Supreme Court ruling on the issue of his citizenship, even if the high tribunal's decision would be adverse to him and allegedly bars him the presidency.

"Definitely, that's the law. I will abide by the law," Poe, who is leading all poll surveys, told reporters while on the campaign trail.

Speaking for the high court, Khan said this was the "position that the SC has got to reject whenever controversial issues are brought before it."

The tribunal has consolidated the three different petitions of Poe's rivals, namely Senator Roco, Senate President Franklin Drilon and Zoilo Velez, asking it to disqualify Poe because he is allegedly not a natural-born Filipino citizen.

The court has scheduled the Thursday, Feb. 26 oral arguments on the petitions and has appointed four friends of the court to help it decide.

A11, A19

Stop extortion, GMA asks Reds after talks

By Vincent Cabreza
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau and Christine F. Figueras

BAGUIO CITY—Following a successful round of peace negotiations between the government and communist rebels in Norway, President Macapagal-Arroyo on Saturday night asked the insurgents to show good faith by stopping the collection of permits to campaign from they were demanding from political candidates.

Ms Macapagal issued the appeal after representatives of the Philippine government and the communist National Democratic Front wrapped up four days of peace negotiations in Oslo with a compromise on the thorny issue of whether the rebels should continue to be labeled as "terrorists."

Chief government negotiator Silvestre Bello III yesterday said the two sides had set another round of formal talks in a bid to end 35 years of a communist insurgency that has killed thousands and blocked development efforts in the countryside.

Ms Macapagal described the so-called Oslo Joint Statement as

CONTINUED A19

Opposition should learn from primaries of US Democrats

By Amando Doronila

ANALYSIS

SEN. JOHN Kerry of Massachusetts has consolidated his front-running position in the contest for the Democratic Party nomination of its challenger to US President George W. Bush in the November elections, with victories over the weekend in party caucuses in Nevada and District of Columbia.

Kerry's wins consigned his remaining rivals for the nomination, building momentum for his campaign that appears irresistible, barring a shock upset, which is unlikely.

Kerry has won 12 of 14 Democratic caucuses and primary elections since the Jan. 19 Iowa caucuses and the Jan. 27 New Hampshire primary—which marked the astonishing turning point of Kerry's considerable years-long behind campaign. Last September, he was considered good on class by poll surveys. He was running third in Senator Vermont Gov. Howard Dean who, in a stunning collapse of his campaign, has not won a single Democratic caucus and primary.

With his weekend victories in Nevada and District of Columbia, Kerry has racked under his belt 109 delegates to the Democratic convention, compared to 182 for Dean and 106 for Sen. John Edwards—two of the remaining rivals. Gen. Wesley Clark, a retired four-star general who endorsed Kerry

The endorsements came after Kerry trounced both Clark and Ed

CONTINUED A19

WINNING IS SO COOL
Pantaya at Edgar, which popularized the song "Mr. Suave," was the Philippines' favorite artist award at the third MTV Asia Awards held Saturday in Singapore.

Joe Salazar's quiet life, times, fashion and faith

By Thelma Sioson San Juan
Correspondent

AT THE time of his death on Saturday, Joe Salazar, 50, a prominent Filipino fashion designer who was no stranger to rub for anything, had finally gotten the recognition he truly deserved from his peers and Philippine society. A newspaperman, editor and a news reporter chronicling his contributions to Philippine fashion since 2001 truly knows.

"You must really be God's friend," he told us, months ago, last September, right after the successful opening of his exhibit. He couldn't believe that we in Metro Magazine could pull it off in just over a month's end, assert Chua, he was surprised that a huge power crowd, from fashionistas to artists and businessmen, had turned up. Salazar was never one to presume.

"Imagine, we didn't even plan, as everything fell into place," he said.

We can never forget his gleeful tone. He was truly happy, in his typically quiet way. He kept saying how grateful

JOE SALAZAR'S A22

FASHION designer Salazar: God visits all those happen.

Gloria reads 'komiks' for 'masa' appeal

By John L. Javellana

EDSA's talks's reading Pinoy komiks?

President Macapagal-Arroyo, who is seeking a full term in the May 10 polls, has been spending quite some time going through "Pinoy Klasik" and other komiks in context.

Although it seems she's seriously reading it, her

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2004

WEATHER FORECAST

Second **FRONTPAGE**

FPJ raises fist at photographer

By Christine O. Avendaño

MPWARDITE caught by surprise, actor-ing Fernando Poe Jr. raised his fist at a news photographer after the latter accidentally hit him with his camera on the left hand during a market visit in Labuo, Pampanga, on Thursday.

But Poe, the standard bearer of the opposition, immediately dropped his fist when he saw that it was Eric de Castro, a photographer for the British wire agency Reuters who had hit him, according to Reuters photographer Edwin Bacasmas, who witnessed the incident.

Bacasmas said the incident happened as Poe and his fellow candidates in the Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino (KNP), which has nominated Arroyo on Feb. 12, made a stopover at the Labuo public market.

He said Poe had gone back to the truck he had been riding in after he shook hands with people at the market.

As Poe moved, reporters were on the lookout for an unlikely interview and Bacasmas said that fellow photographers scrambled to the presidential hopeful's truck after seeing a posse of Presidente Macapagal-Arroyo hanging from its rear.

Poe assumed he (also a photographer with the President as his backpresent," said Bacasmas, prompting him and other photographers to get into PFJ's truck.

As Bacasmas was climbing over, he said he saw De Castro, who were ahead of him, accidentally hit the left hand of Poe with his camera. This immediately drew a response from the two unwitting foe.

"Bwisit ng mirrak (It looked like a fist)," he said of Poe's move. He added that the presidential hot dropped his fist though when he saw that it was a photographer.

"Parang (like an) action star," Bacasmas commented. But Poe said yesterday he was not aware of what happened. "Di ko alam (no

ACTION king and presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr. takes Holy Communion in Macarang, Pangasinan, yesterday with the same hand that he reportedly raised at a photographer who accidentally hit him with a camera last week. Behind is his running mate Sen. Loren Legarda.

Joker Arroyo retains title of 'Scrooge' of Congress

By Michael Lim Ubac

SEN. JOKER Arroyo is still Congress' undisputed Scrooge.

For the 12th straight year, Arroyo has maintained his reputation as the most frugal legislator, spending only P6.1 million from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2002, according to an audit of senators' expenses based on Commission on Audit regulations.

The head of the powerful Blue Ribbon Committee, Arroyo also received the lowest expenses in 2001 (P5.39 million), the year he assumed his Senate seat, carrying over the budget of movements he had earned while serving a full nine-year term in the House of Representatives.

The list showed Arroyo spent only P6,152,867.75 for the salaries of his staff, as well as expenses for mileage, subsistence and office supplies. He also did not charge for any honor, travel, professional or consultancy fees and had no office space and equipment rentals and capital outlay against the Senate budget.

Just as thrifty was Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile, who spent P9.4 million in 2002. The most wasteful spenders were Senators Edgardo Angara (P18.4 million), Manuel Villar (P18.6 million) and Sergio Osmeña III (P20.9 million).

On the other side of the aisle, opposition Sen. Wigberto Tañada topped the list of frugal high rollers.

Tañada disbursed taxpayer money to cover his share of P12.6 million, followed closely by Senators Ralph Recto (P12.4 million), Aquilino Pimentel Jr. (P12.2 million) and John Osmeña (P12.1 million).

Senate President Franklin Drilon, former Majority Leader Loren Legarda and the rest of the senators belonged to the mid-range spenders, spending P11 million and above each. And while Sen. Ruffy Lanzon had entered his 2003 pork barrel allocation, Arroyo had not bothered to mark his at all.

Based on the same list, from all we had the most number of staffers who could be the most pampered employees in the Senate, receiving P5.3 million in salaries and benefits. In comparison, Arroyo's staff only received a total package of P938,306. Rogers spent P8.1 million in professional or consultancy fees, compared to Drilon's P9,900.

Asked earlier why he had only two staff members and a driver, Arroyo said: "Well, I have a very efficient staff." Since close to half of the payment is swallowing in poverty, he said spending more than what the legislator work really entailed was irrational. Although he was undemolished in the House, Arroyo boasts that he logged 300 percent attendance for nine years. In the Senate, Arroyo and Pimentel have the best attendance records.

Arroyo received a heavy volume of land, more than any congressman at any given time during his three terms in the House. "It was not very convenient. I had to sue and read the mail myself and send out writers replies," he also wrote his press releases by hand where he was a congressman. In the Senate, he still writes his own statements, but those are now either typewritten or printed on a computer.

PCASO

PHILIPPINE CHAMBER OF ARRASTRE AND STEVEDORING OPERATORS

MANIFESTO

OF TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION

WHEREAS, the Philippine Chamber of Arrastre and Stevedoring Operators (PCASO for brevity) is an association of cargo handling service providers duly licensed to render stevedoring and arrastre services in various ports within the Philippine archipelago;

WHEREAS, it is the primary objective of PCASO to build and make the Philippine ports globally competitive in terms of productivity, efficiency and effectiveness;

WHEREAS, the Chamber, consistent with its organizational vision and aspirations, aims to become instrumental in maintaining industrial peace in the ports through effective and realistic partnership with the appropriate government agencies;

WHEREAS, the Chamber, for the past years has worked closely with the incumbent national leadership, and in partnership therewith, has advanced its cause and aspirations above stated;

WHEREAS, the present administration under the leadership of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has shown commitment and resolved with concrete action, towards the improvement of port services over the country as well as industrial peace in the cargo handling labor sector; and

WHEREFORE, for and in consideration of the foregoing premises, the members of the Philippine Chamber of Arrastre and Stevedoring Operators, manifesting its full trust and confidence in the present national leadership, have resolved, as they do hereby resolve, to extend their full support to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in her bid for re-election this coming May 2004 national elections.

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(SGD.) Gilbert P. Lawsin
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Noel M. Tan
Jose Villanueva Sr.

SPORTS

Editor Rodolfo S. Melendrez
Assistant Editor Edwin M. Villanueva

RP pros out to break long dry spell in Asian Tour

By Joey Arnaiz

CHANCES of a Filipino pro ending the country's five-year drought in the Asian Tour remain strong despite an imposing invasion of foreign pros in the 104K-sponsored 68th Philippine Open golf championship on Feb. 26-29 at the Lamer course of the Riviera Golf and Country Club.

There will be at least 20 Filipino pros in the starting field of 132 players. Leading the homegrown lists is Frankie Miñoza, who won two legs in the Asian Tour in a memorable 1998 campaign when he broke into the Top 10 of the world rankings.

One of those victories was the Philippine Open at the Cavalier course of the Riviera.

At the moment, Miñoza, 44, is certainly not as competitive as he was back in 1998. But he still commands the respect of the class in the Asian Tour and he should become a solid threat when the Open, promoted by San Miguel Beer, is held later days from now.

Gerald Bondoc had actually won the Open in 2000 but it was then not part of the Asian circuit due to the latter's regulations.

To break the spell, the local pros will need to beat a talent laden cast of about a hundred players from 18 countries. At the vanguard of this challenge is defending champion Rich Cilloni of Canada who came home in Manila.

Among the 100 foot regulars scheduled to play are Thai brothers Boonchu Ruangkit and former amateur sensation Prom Meesawat, European Tour regular Jeev Milkha Singh of India, former Open winners Anthony Fang (US), Nek Chang-sup (Taiwan) and Hsieh Chen-tiung (Taiwan).

Eji Shi Hao, the leader of a breakaway group of Asian pros now sweeping the Tour, is also coming not just to compete but also to supervise the fifth tournament in their schedule after the Thailand Open, the Johnnie Walker Classic, the Myanmar Open and the world's $900,000 Malaysian Open.

Dutch Young, director for Tour development of the Euro group based in Singapore, said that Tour aided him in

MIKEDA (continued to page 2)

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TOYOTA

Messiah coming–Roco

By Michael Lim Ubac
and TJ Burgonio

ALTAVAS (Aklan)—Presidential candidate Raul Roco yesterday compared the next President to a messiah who will redeem the country from the dark abyss.

"One of us will eventually become a messiah," said Roco, stressing that the country's 36 million voters cannot afford to elect just anybody to chart their future for the next six years.

Talking in parable, Roco said there was a town which used to be happy and prosperous because its people traveled as one. But by some miracle of fate, the townsfolk became lonely and the town became gloomy.

Bereft of joy and inspiration, a gave (watcher) came one day telling the people that Heaven would send someone—a messiah—who will bring back the town's lost glory.

When the townsfolk asked if they were being punished, the gave said: "One of you will become a messiah. But you don't know him yet, for only he knows knows."

And so, Roco said, the people began to work as one again, helping one another, doing good things with the hope that one of them will be the chosen one.

As a result, the people became united, and the town became happy again.

Turning to Aklanon supporters, Roco said the townsfolk were the 60 million Filipinos. "We can be the messiah by being responsible ... working together, helping one another."

If we only help one another from our present economic and political stagnation, "one of us will become the messiah."

But Aklanon senatorial candidate Edna Jones, became grave not of Nuevo Ecija, said the people should not look for "the one who the messiah is the parents of Raul Roco."

Jones said Roco impersonated the characteristics of a messiah—who is willing to challenge the existing order to save his people from doom.

Roco initiated the parable during the inauguration of the headquarters of Aklanon Democratikas, one of the cornerstone of Aksyon ng Pag-Asa, in Pacijo City.

After leading the inauguration, the Aklanon duo trooped to the Nepomuk Gonzales High School in Mandalayong City, then moved to Muntinlupa in Rizal to visit an urban poor resettlement area.

BRO. EDDIE Villanueva takes his presidential campaign to Hong Kong but apparently fails to impress some Filipino domestic helpers (behind) who let him know who their candidate is. At left is Migrante party-list candidate for representative Connie Bragas-Regalado.

Bro. Eddie draws mixed reactions in Hong Kong

HONG KONG—Presidential candidate Bro. Eddie Villanueva pressed the flesh with Filipino domestic helpers here Sunday, hoping to parlay the support he's gained as a Christian evangelist into a winning campaign.

Villanueva may be outmatched by President Macapagal-Arroyo, action star Fernando Poe Jr. and former Senator and Education Secretary Raul Roco, but his appearance added a bit of color to a bright Sunday—when maids here get their weekly day off.

Sporting a gray jacket and pink shirt with a garland around his neck, Villanueva greeted passersby Filipinos, praising their work and the cash they send home.

"The Philippine economy is being kept afloat by the foreign exchange being remitted by our countrymen abroad," Villanueva told The Associated Press as he started campaigning.

Overseas Filipinos can vote for the first time ever in the May elections, and more than 360,000 have registered—almost 10,000 of them in Hong Kong.

But Filipino fans voiced mixed responses to Villanueva.

"We know he can fight corruption," said 33-year old Bernadette Bonaire of Nueva Vizcaya, a fan who joined the Sunday crowd.

Others were less impressed.

"I don't like him," said Estrella Bagadiano, 41, a native of Ilocos Norte who was more impressed by Mr Macapagal's reform issues. "She's done something already. I don't like to change the government again."

A Marxist radical turned flamboyant evangelist, Villanueva lacks the backing of a traditional political party.

But he commands some support as the leader of a prominent Christian group, the Jesus Is Lord Movement.

The group once claimed 7 million members around the world.

A Senate candidate from Roco's party, lawyer Rolando Mauricio, also was making the rounds Sunday.

Villanueva has said he prefers a federalist form of government and is open to Charter change if the people want it.

In his primer on government, Villanueva said he believes federalism is best for the country but he would not insist on it if the Filipinos think otherwise. AP, Blanche S. Rivera

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Monday, February 16, 2004
6th Week in Ordinary Time

1st Reading: Jas 1:1-11
Gospel: Mk 8:11-13

The Pharisees came and started to argue with Jesus, hoping to embarrass him. They asked for some heavenly sign. Then his spirit was moved. He gave a deep sigh and said, "Why do the people of this present time ask for a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this people." Then he left them, got into the boat again and went to the other side of the lake.

Commentary:

Today's reading is just a warm up for tomorrow's, when Jesus tells against "the yeast of the Pharisees," I will be useful to have a recent reminder of what they are like.

Staging an ambush has they asked for some heavenly sign." Six minutes (which of ways) appealed to Jesus' ears not enough, they wanted a spectacle. A spectacle would amaze for half an amount the rills, not touch their hearts...because their hearts were untouch-able. They wanted to make a total of him, without being in trial themselves. They would have him from the sidelines while remaining safely out of would themselves. That's not fair play in any field.

There are people whose whole life game is like that: just just love them!

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Manapat also created disk vs Ping, says Lacson camp

By Norman Bordadora

CAMP AGUINALDO, Manila—If PGMA is desperate, could Ping Lacson be Chinese?

The administration may have fabricated "very damaging" material supposedly from the National Archives to start a demolition job against opposition presidential bet Panfilo Lacson, a senatorial candidate said yesterday.

Nueva Ecija Rep. Carlos Padilla, Lacson's only senatorial candidate under the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats and the LDP slate, raised two disks from former Archives head Rhodora Manapat's office after the detective went on leave.

"One (disk) was against opposition candidate Fernando Poe Jr., while the other one was against Senator Lacson. We got the disks with the help of the archives employees who raised an outcry against Manapat," Padilla said.

Although he has yet to preview the disk, Padilla made it clear that if contained fabricated archives material that would be distributed in Lacson's campaign whether or not the citizenship issue against Poe prospered in the Supreme Court.

"It's very damaging," Padilla told reporters who gathered for Lacson's visit to this remote fishing village but its town fiesta.

Lacson said the administration is doing everything to cripple the opposition's chances in the May elections.

"(With Manapat's exposé), they made FPJ an American citizen. With this new disk, they might want to make me a Chinese citizen," Lacson said.

Lacson, a former national police chief who led a crackdown on kidnapping-for-ransom against Chinese-Filipino businessmen and their scions, enjoys the support of most of the country's Chinese community.

The disks are now reportedly with Lacson spokesperson Lito Banayo.

PCGG did right by martial law victims, says exec

By Dona Z. Pazzibugan

WITH OR without a compensation law, the Presidential Commission on Good Government believes it has done its duty for the victims of abuse during martial law.

"Our duty is to be able to answer to the Swiss Ministry of Justice (the) efforts were taken (to compensate the victims)," said PCGG Commissioner Ruben Carranza.

Compensation was among the conditions set by the Swiss Federal Supreme Court when it (un)locked the funds seized from the family of late strongman Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines in 1997 even without a final court ruling.

The Philippine government had promised the Swiss government it would compensate the victims.

Carranza insisted that "the commitment was to take steps, not to compensate."

"Of course it's so much better if the other succeeded," he added.

Before Congress went on recess on Jan. 6, the legislators were able to pass House Bill No. 4125 which sets up an P6-billion compensation fund. The counterpart bill in the Senate failed to pass after the senators took up another matter.

Carranza refused to comment, saying the PCGG's main concern is that a law is passed when Congress resumes session after the May 10 presidential elections. The PCGG fears the bill might be shelved again when the new Congress opens on June 30.

"We don't have any control of (the law's contents). It's up to Congress. We'll be happy with a law that compensates victims of the Marcos regime," Carranza said.

President Macapagal-Arroyo, who is seeking another term, had ordered that P6 billion of the $684 million (P36.2 billion) seized from the Marcoses be set aside pending the passage of a compensation law. Before it's passed, all recovered ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses and their cronies would go to the agrarian reform program of the government.

"There's no such urgency anymore. If there's no law, then there's the existing law (that all ill-gotten wealth would go to agrarian reform)," Carranza said.

Malaysia delays RP-MILF peace talks

EXPLORATORY talks on ending the decades-old Muslim rebellion have been delayed at the request of peace broker Malaysia, a government official said yesterday.

The talks, which Manila had hoped would lead to the rapid resumption of long-stalled formal peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the country's biggest Muslim separatist group, were to have been held in Kuala Lumpur starting today.

President Macapagal-Arroyo had expressed the hope the government could settle peace deals with the Muslims and with communist rebels separately fighting for a Marxist state before the presidential elections in May.

But analysts have said the chances of ending the two revolts anytime soon seem remote.

"The talks with the Muslim rebels have been delayed a few days "on the request of Malaysia," Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia said.

The neighboring Muslim country chief "administrators reasons" for the delay, said Garcia, Philippine ceasefire panel chief, who was to take part in the meeting.

"Definitely, it's not going to be (since) now, but we are expecting it to be held any time within a few days," he said.

The talks were meant to discuss the specific role of a team of 21 Malaysian observers which will monitor a shaky ceasefire between Manila and the MILF. Reuters

Gov't needs ₱3.6B to immunize Pinoys vs flu

By Blanche S. Rivera

THE GOVERNMENT will need P3.6 billion to immunize high-risk groups against influenza as international health experts warned against a possible pandemic in the next three years, following the bird flu crisis.

Rubilenda Nolasco, Philippine Health Insurance vice president for quality assurance and policy development, said that since the emergence of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) last year, health experts have been studying how to prevent similar viruses from affecting the public.

She said the Optimum Flue conference in Okinawa, Japan last October warned governments that there could be a pandemic of influenza in the next two-to-four years.

Working with WHO

In a forum at the Manila Pavilion yesterday, Valera said the government agency has been working with the World Health Organization on draft guidelines in battling disease, influenza in particular.

One of the proposed strategies is to vaccinate people as soon as possible. Valera said Philhealth was studying whether it could include immunization in its medical care package.

Initial studies showed that the Philippines would need some P3.6 billion to immunize priority groups like senior citizens, babies up to 23 months of age, health care workers and those with immune deficiency illnesses.

Rising expenses

"I do not know if the government can afford this," Valera said. Last year, Philhealth spent P14.9 billion in benefit payments. Expenses have been increasing by almost P1 billion yearly since 1998.

The cheapest vaccine available for the southern hemisphere type influenza costs P475, not the P3.6 billion cost estimate for immunization had the vaccine price been only P350.

"We're asking vaccine manufacturers to help by lowering their prices," Valera said.

Savings per person

Studies have also shown that Philhealth would save or total P1,200 in the case of drugs, professional fees and sick leave benefits per person if they implemented the immunization program.

Valera noted that pneumonia and influenza patients were the top reimbursed cases in Philhealth's influenza cases peak in June and July, and from October to December, she said.

Said flu has killed at least 19 people in Asia, which was beaten hit by the H5N1 virus of the subtype of influenza A, known as avian influenza or bird flu virus.

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C1B6 Beijing, Shanghai 6 Days
C1A Beijing, Xian, Guilin 6 - 8 Days
C1B Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Guilin 6 - 9 Days
C1C Beijing, Xian, Shanghai, Guilin 8 -10 Days
C2 Hangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Guilin 6 -11 Days
B61 Mt. Potuo, Shanghai 4 Days
A1 Three Gorges Cruises 3 - 11 Days
FN51 Korea, Shanghai 8 Days

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RP-wide anti-drugs caravan rolls off

"ALL SYSTEMS are go for Lakbay Kontra Droga 2004," Interior Secretary Jose Lina said yesterday on the eve of the nationwide anti-drug caravan which rolls off today from 14 points.

The caravan will go to each barangay from Saturday to July to gather firsthand information on the drug problem, Lina said.

The 14 areas are Isabela City, Zamboanga del Sur, Misamis Occidental, Bukidnon, Misamis Oriental, Surigao del Norte and Davao City, Palawan, San Jose, Antique, Iloilo City, Bacolod City, Tagbilaran City, Tacloban City, Valenzuela and Santa Rosa, Laguna, Cavite and Quezon.

Lina said the caravan will conduct drug symposia, a dragon contest and film showings, and update barangay drug watchlists in conjunction with local government units and non-governmental organizations. — Rafaud G. Rivera

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SC: We're not cowed by Poe's supporters

on the disqualification petition.

Salonga's view

Former Senate President Jovito Salonga, yesterday said the Supreme Court was facing a much tougher dilemma in the disqualification petition against Poe than the previous one that had questioned the legitimacy of the Macapagal administration. Gloria promulgate.

"This is a more difficult case," he said in a telephone interview.

Salonga said the public had been "conditioned" by Poe's supporters that a decision unfavorable to the presidential candidate "should be rejected."

"There's a different kind of mind-conditioning today," he said, noting that Poe's supporters have resorted of civil unrest in case of a disqualification.

In contrast, the 2001 petition questioning the legitimacy of the Macapagal administration was not too tough to swallow because the public had been "conditioned" that she was the legitimate president, Salonga said.

Text rumors

Asked to comment on rumors the SC had voted 9-5 to disqualify him, Poe said the rumors were being passed through text messages. "But all text messages are conjectural. Hopefully, the SC will judge on the merits of the case," he said.

The rumors against Poe against all more of his followers who threatened to take to the streets and incite unrest if their candidate was disqualified.

Poe, however, downplayed the threat. "It cannot ripen [Proclamation] into violence and unrest," he said.

Poe's text response yesterday was in stark contrast to his earlier veiled threats against the occupants of Malacañang whom he suspects of being behind the move to disqualify him. "Bahi ada ang kutol na ginatak ng amay (They might not see the light of day)," Poe had told members of Barangay.

Desperate

In Dagupan City, Poe's running mate Sen. Loren Legarda disagreed reports that the camp would eventually be disqualified from the presidential race for not being a natural-born Filipino.

Legarda, who was with Poe and fellow candidates of the Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino, said the camp's that the Supreme Court had already come up with a ruling to disqualify Poe were nothing but the result of the "desperate."

"There's a desperate move to hamper the course of the race for his is a runaway winner," she said.

At a news conference with Legarda, KNP senatorial candidate Francisco Tatad warned that people would not take kindly any move to disqualify Poe.

He claimed that there was a "popular belief that FPJ will be the next president."

"There is no way of predicting what will happen, but any act of injustice or unfairness versus Poe will provoke terrible things on the ground," he said.

But Tatad said he hoped there would be no "spontaneous combustion."

Tatad said there was no basis to disqualify Poe because the issue was a natural born Filipino.

He expressed concern on "persistent reports" that the Supreme Court had already drafted a ruling to disqualify Poe, but he said he hoped the rumor was true.

Tatad said he hoped that the justices would "become statesmen." He noted that the "Supreme Court is pure, but the justices are not," saying that "many of the appointees are partisan to this administration."

Remain calm

Khan urged the people to remain calm and "listen" only to official pronouncements by the en banc.

At this stage, he is very confident that the people rely on the Supreme Court rather than feed on the malicious insinuations of other sectors, he said.

"I think everybody should be assured that whatever the ruling of the SC, it will be in accordance with the facts and the law," the Supreme Court spokesperson said.

Khan cited instances in the past when the high court had decided cases in favor of the losing party.

Referring to Poe, his supporters and Sen. Ramon Revilla, Khan reminded them that it was premature to speculate on the possible outcome of the petition considering that it had yet to be given due course.

"The high court has not yet assumed jurisdiction over the petition to disqualify Poe and so it's very early in the day to make hasty and rash out of it," he said.

Pocket process

The People's Alliance for Truth and Justice, a group of Poe supporters, yesterday said it would launch a series of mass actions to counter the said suspension.

"We will not take this sitting down," said Arnold Glima, PAT convenor. "We will urge the Supreme Court to really study the case and not allow itself to become part of a grand scheme to have an leader disqualified."

Glima said the PAT, the 1EJ for Freedom Movement, the Association of Generals for Poe Pajero and other groups would meet today to discuss plans for the protest actions.

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Gloria reads 'komiks' for 'masa' appeal

[illegible] new lobby has an urgent utilitarian purpose.

According to Palace sources, Ms Macapagal is studying double time to improve her Pilipino, get its nuances right, and eventually speak it with ease and, others assert ever—the better to realize herself to the mass in a campaign that has pitted her against the man who's considered "King of Philippine Movies."

Fernando For Jr., aka "Da King," was elected to remember films playing hero of the downtrodden, defeating this impressive records—and punchlines—flawlessly. The fans love it, even now (especially now!) that his **has been using movie screenplay-sounding** quips to open up his campaign speeches.

The President is not leaving anything to chance. Sources say she has been sending Komiks stuff, "even love stories," to familiarize herself with day-to-day exchanges among the commoners.

A Palace official said Ms Macapagal was also holding more frequent discussions with the commentators to practice her Pilipino while addressing their concerns. Another source said the President was, in fact, being "tutored" by a noted radio host.

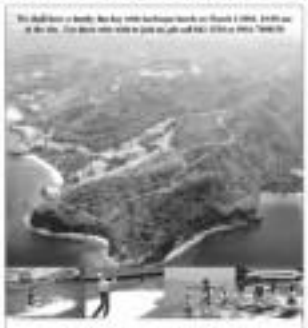
Daughter of the late President Diosdado Macapagal, who was fondly called "Star Boy from Lubao," Ms Macapagal was an economics graduate and university professor before she followed in her father's footsteps. The language in her household is said to be Spanish. Aside from this, she speaks in English and French.

Shrinks "Hot" Jimenez, presidential adviser on official development assistance projects and a close confidante, said Ms Macapagal could manage conversational Tagalog. Kumpanggan, Pangalisdik, Bisaya, Ilonggo, Cebuanos and Ilocanos.

In her provincial stories, the President switches interminently and effortlessly to the local dialect. But when it comes to Pilipino (which is largely based on Tagalog), she could be comically inept when translating her lines from an English speech for the benefit of a mass audience.

During the failed Inkosozi meeting on July 27, Ms Macapagal reportedly said her government would respect freedom of expression and tolerate dissent only up to a certain point. "Ipaguhit natin ang linya," she said, meaning she would draw the line clearly between legal protests and attempts at destabilization.

In recent weeks, she has harped on her "experience" as Chief Executive in the past three years as a distinct advantage over her rivals. Though she inherited four million jobless Filipinos and political chaos from her predecessor, she said in several speeches, "pinahon iker namin ang sikonomiya" (the really meant to say only that she turned the economy around. The imagery being far from agreeable, this naturally was received guffawing.



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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2004

American troops back ...

[illegible] military exercises (balikatan) 04.

The high-speed vessel "Westpac Express," that carried the troops here the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force based in Okinawa, Japan, docked at the old naval supply depot pier here at around 9 a.m. yesterday. It also transported military equipment, such as highly mobile multipurpose vehicles and communications equipments to be used during the field training.

Capt. Darrell Fenner, US Armed Forces public information officer, said 1,600 more American troops were due to arrive in the next few days to join 2,300 Filipino soldiers participating in simultaneous training in three military camps in Luzon from Feb. 23 to March 7.

Sunday's contingent proceeded to the Philippine Air Force camp at the Clark Special Economic Zone in Pampanga, the biggest American military air base in the Asia-Pacific region until 1991.

Clad in camouflage, Sky Marines descended down a gangplank from the leased multi-purpose vessel, with firearms, forklifts, rifles and other military equipment. They are due to be flown immediately to the 60th Mission Command headquarters in Puerto Princesa City.

No Spratlys mission

Fenner reiterated that no exercises would be done in the Spratlys group of islands, contrary to earlier reports.

He said the personnel would be restricted to the Western camp and "northern area" the Spratlys that are being contested, in whole or in part, by the Philippines, China, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam. Five of the claimants have put troops on islands or reefs in the chain, which is also host to shipping routes and rich fishing grounds.

Maj. Michael Samson, chief of the administration and operations branch of the 60th public information office, said the mutual defense treaty of the two countries had decided to include Puerto Princesa as one of the [illegible] joint exercise and humanitarian assistance.

He said the troops would build and repair school buildings in the city. "The decision has nothing to do with Palawan's strategic location or whatsoever," he said.

According to Samson, the US military is spending $200,000 for humanitarian missions in Palawan and Batanes. Other civic assistance projects include medical, dental and veterinary clinics at selected areas.

Engineering projects to improve the local infrastructure will also be conducted during the exercise, Samson said.

War games

Aside from Marines, where the training is being held for the first time, war games are also scheduled in Clark, in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija, and in Subic, Zambales.

For the first time, civic assistance is scheduled in Palawan and in Basco, Batanes, where the landing of US aircraft once 3004 Seconds Air Force Base, is completed to host some residents and Batanes Rep. Florencio Abad.

Fenner said this year's Balikatan covered types of training dealing with a "variety of threats to include terrorism."

"The focus of the Balikatan is to improve our combined training, combat readiness and interoperability," he said.

Asked about the threat from terrorist groups operating in the country, Fenner said the US forces were confident the security arrangements made between the United States and the Philippines.

"As with every military operation, there is an element of risk. US military members are required to take safety precautions, including force protection requirements," he said.

Large-scale war games and smaller exercises jointly conducted by Philippine and US forces stopped in 1991 when the Senate rejected the extension of the 1947 US-Philippine Military Bases Agreement.

But the exercises resumed in 1999 after the Senate approved the Visiting Forces Agreement, which was aimed to strengthening the 54-year-old mutual defense treaty between the two countries.

Fenner said this year's Balikatan was the 20th in a series of exercises. PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

Stop extortion ...

[illegible] a "very, very good conclusion to this round of talks in Oslo." But she said the rebels should immediately show good faith.

"I call upon the New People's Army to desist from [some political candidates], especially in light of the good news that we are receiving now from Europe on the negotiations with the NDF," Ms. Macapagal said at a press conference at the presidential mansion.

"That's extortion and the police and the military have been instructed to enforce the law," she said.

The military has been documenting complaints from Lanao politicians that the NPA was collecting as much as P150,000 in "permits-to-campaign" fees. Only candidates who pay the PTC fees are allowed to campaign in areas controlled by the NPA.

Various groups have denounced the PTC fees imposed by the NPA. The rebels have said that all the candidates, including Ms. Macapagal, must pay the fee.

The government panel raised the issue of PTC fees in Oslo, but no agreement was reached.

After four days of tough negotiations, both the government and NDF panels signed the "Oslo Joint Statement" which outlined the next embrace on Saturday morning.

The declaration calls on the United States, European Union, Canada and Australia "to support the efforts of the parties in resolving the outstanding issues" of the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the NPA, being on the terrorist" listing."

The NDF had demanded that the Philippine government join it in its demand that the Western countries strike off the CPP and NPA from their list of terrorist organizations. The terrorist tag has hampered the rebels' ability to raise funds abroad, prompting them to step up extortion activities and attacks back home, according to the military.

US Embassy Charges d'Affaires Joseph Mussomeli said December that Washington would remove the CPP and NPA from its list of terrorist groups once a final peace agreement was signed. But Mussomeli added the blacklist should not hinder the peace negotiations.

The communist rebellion is "unlike al-Qaeda or the Abu Sayyaf," said Luis Jalandoni, head negotiator for the NDF panel.

"Our priorities and our principles are those of a liberation movement like the ANC," Jalandoni said, referring to the African National Congress, the apartheid movement of Nelson Mandela in South Africa.

"The biggest correction are those arising in the White House," Jalandoni said in reference to President Bush's [illegible] during the signing ceremony in Oslo. "Those carrying out state terrorism with so-called preemptive strikes, invading other countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, and bombing others like Yugoslavia."

Aside the government side of the negotiating table, however, Bello merely said that the decision of the terrorist label "would be unfavorable by both sides but without prejudice to our existing foreign policy."

The two delegations have asked Chief Norway the facilitator of their talks, "inform the international community about this common position."

The government and NDF panels also decided to create a joint committee to oversee the implementation of an agreement they signed in 1998 to respect human rights and international humanitarian laws.

The assassination of two human rights activists in Mindoro on Friday evening drove home the importance of having such a committee, Jalandoni said.

Next round

Bello said the next round of talks has been scheduled in March in Norway or even to the Philippines, with the Norwegian government acting again as third-party facilitator.

He said the government was no longer bent on having a final peace agreement signed before the May 10 elections.

But Bello remained optimistic that a final accord could be [illegible] up soon should the [illegible] working committees make substantial agreements in the two weeks before the March talks.

"There's no major stumbling block, both panels are committed to the peace talks," he told the Inquirer in a telephone interview from Manila. Jalandoni where he stopped over on his way back to manila from the four-day talks in Oslo.

The NDF panel accused the government's commitment on the [illegible] demilitarization of about 15,000 human rights victims during the Marcos regime, according to Bello.

Hailing the Oslo talks as a "vital step toward peace," Speaker Jose de Venecia yesterday said that the House of Representatives had already contacted its counterpart [illegible] package for the Marcos victims.

The NDF also got the government to agree on the release of political prisoners in a month, during a [illegible] meeting.

Working committees have been directed to discuss and draft an agreement on agrarian reform and national industrialization, all, to which another group would tackle political and constitutional matters.

The last item, an end to hostilities, would be "easy to settle" once the first two issues had been agreed upon, according to Bello.

Peace talks were suspended three years ago, after the NPA murdered two legislators. Both sources from Deputy Colloso, PDI Northern [illegible] Bureau. AP/with AP

The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Greco

Thai boy 20th bird flu fatality

BANGKOK—A 13-year-old boy has died of bird flu in Thailand, taking the death toll from the virus rampaging through Asia to at least 20, a health ministry official said on Sunday.

"He died last night of respiratory failure," Dr Charal Trinnachoipong, chief of the Department of Disease Control, said Reuters.

The virulent H5N1 bird flu has spread to eight Asian nations, killed 14 Vietnamese and six Thais and devastated the poultry industry.

The 13-year old boy was bedridden to have caught the disease through contact with sick chickens, officials said.

The other Thai deaths—four boys aged between 6 and 7 and a 58-year-old woman—are also thought to have had contact with infected poultry.

Four parents that the bird flu virus could combine with a human flu virus to become a deadly disease that can spread among people. Now there are concerns the virus may have begun to mutate already.

Thai officials say a closeted hospital in a zoo near Bangkok died of bird flu last month, but it was not yet clear whether the H5N1 virus was responsible.

The animal died on Jan. 27 at Bangkok Zoo, 60 km east of Bangkok and had had no contact with chickens, Environment Minister Pinpin Supasbandhu said on Friday.

If confirmed, experts say it would be the first case of avian influenza in such animals.

"If it's true, there have been no reports of these kinds of animals succumbing to bird flu," Prof Malik Peiris, an avian influenza expert at the University of Hong Kong, said on Sunday.

Experts say the virus, which has hexed the slaughter of some 60 million birds in the region, mostly in Vietnam and Thailand, is probably spread by migrating birds.

The United Nations has warned Asian countries now in the area on a bird flu virus because the epidemic was still spreading in Cambodia, China, Indonesia and Laos.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has stressed that poorer Asian countries had neither the resources nor the organization to eradicate the fast spreading H5N1 virus, reflecting the fears of experts that it could flare again.

Thailand has slaughtered 30 million poultry to eradicate the virus and says it is killing the last birds in its last epidemic area.

With an eye on its industrial 10 billion-a-year export trade in chicken, Thailand is pressing overseas customers like Japan and Europe to test its birds for the virus in an effort to shower import bans that had devastated the industry.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, whose government was accused of an initial cover-up of the outbreaks, said he expected the country to be clear of bird flu by the end of the month.

"There are only pillow cases until the end of the month, but I'm absolutely cleared," Thaksin said in a weekly radio address on Saturday. Reuters

SNOW IN JERUSALEM AP/EPA

A man walks in heavy snowfall outside Jerusalem's Old City Feb. 14. A rare heavy snow storm hit the Israeli capital causing severe traffic jams.

New oil shock could buckle economies

WASHINGTON—The global economy has withstood more than a year of high oil prices since the Iraq war began—from Asian tigers, but wide-spread worldwide price shock would close up the brakes.

Danger signals would flash if prices breached $40 a barrel, economists said, though the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries now unlikely to let things deteriorate so far.

Pumping US winter readily, lower US commercial crude oil inventories and supply interruptions sent prices of light sweet crude above $36 a barrel last month—the highest since President George W. Bush gained up for war in Iraq.

After falling back, supply concerns again pushed New York's benchmark contract up-ward Friday, sending light sweet crude for delivery in March up 38 cents to $34.66 a barrel.

"It does not look like the oil price will go down any time soon and that is in part because of the dollar depreciation—Opec wants to maintain their purchasing power," said Wells Fargo. Reuters chief economist Sung Won Sohn.

Opec members agreed Tuesday in an output by about 10 percent by April 1, supporting world crude prices despite skepticism in the market about the cartel's ability to carry out its decision.

The impact of the high oil prices on the economy had been muted so far, Sohn said.

"It is like a tax increase, but we have had a tax cut so the effect of the higher price of oil has not been really severe," Sohn said.

Higher oil prices had not repeated the cycle of the 1970s and 1980s, when they accelerated a surge price spiral, leading to higher inflation, the economist said.

But "the worst possible combination is that the price of oil goes up to $40 or $45 a barrel...that could really break down the US and global economies," Sohn said.

"I don't expect that, but that is one thing that we worry about," he added. "Hopefully Opec is smart enough to understand that if we go into recession it does not help them." AFP

Vietnam War returns to haunt America's presidential race

By Patrick Arridjis

WASHINGTON — Three decades on, the Vietnam War has returned to haunt the US presidential race, pitting a decorated combat veteran against a president who avoided it as a career, were cast by one military service.

US Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts, aged 60 and favored to win the Democratic presidential nomination, won the Silver Star and Bronze Star for valor in Vietnam and received three Purple Hearts for wounds.

President George W. Bush, three years Kerry's junior, never went to Vietnam.

Instead, he chose to fulfill his military obligation by enlisting in the Texas Air National Guard as a fighter pilot, which was perfectly legal, but is nonetheless viewed by some veterans as a cushy berth serving on the battlefield.

Beyond that, Democratic National Committee chairman Terry McAuliffe, who served Bush of going absent without leave from the National Guard.

The charge is tied to a murky period in Bush's National Guard record in 1972-73 when he whereabouts have not been fully documented. There is however no evidence Bush was absent without authorization.

The White House has produced Bush's National Guard payslips and other records for the period to counter, claiming they show him to have been present when ordered to be.

But the presidential press corps has been wholeheartedly dogging White House press secretary Scott McClellan for more proof, as an assistant leading Kerry that has overshadowed some of his briefings.

The White House made public a 2.5-inch-thick stack of documents Friday from Bush's time in the Texas National Guard in its latest effort to quash the charges.

But the records released on Bush's order are unlikely to quell charges from Democrats that he shirked his duties.

Kerry, who enlisted in the army in 1965, has made Vietnam a central campaign issue, vexing Republican efforts to portray the Bush administration as the sole guardian of national security.

On the campaign trail Kerry routinely surrounds himself with fellow Vietnam veterans, one of whom he saved from certain death in the Mekong Delta.

Bush was first challenged into campaigning against the backdrop of another war, Iraq, as controversial and divisive as was Vietnam.

Kerry is trying to sell his character on his patriotism, character, sense of duty and leadership qualities. AFP

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24 killed as snow-heavy Moscow roof collapses

MOSCOW—Rescuers used their bare hands to search for survivors on Sunday after the glass roof of a popular Moscow swimming complex collapsed under the weight of snow, killing at least 24 people and injuring more than 100.

With the temperature at minus 20 Celsius (minus 4 Fahrenheit), giant heating machines were brought in to blast hot air with warm air in an effort to keep trapped survivors from freezing to death.

More than 600 people were in the area when the roof caved in, showering them with shards of glass, and a total of 1,200 visitors were in the entire complex, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov said. It was unclear how many remained trapped under the debris.

Local media speculated that the cause of the tragedy might be poor construction. They said prosecutors had ignited a criminal investigation into whether the roof collapse was caused by failure to fulfill "professional obligations." A spokesman for Russia's Emergencies Ministry said that the death toll from Saturday night's accident had risen to 24, including at least four children, and that 130 people were injured. Doctors said most of the children were among the severer casualties.

Hundreds of rescue workers were still searching for survivors more than 12 hours after the roof of the two-year-old building collapsed. Workers removed the rubble piece by piece, two cranes in their eight rescue vehicles.

"The collapse is very extensive, work will continue for some five hours more," Itar-Tass news agency quoted one rescue worker at the scene as saying after dawn on Sunday.

Rescue workers were still hearing cries for help from under the wreckage of the upper path in the southwest of the city.

"The rescuers recorded the people's voices and their calls for help sounding from three spots. Periodically, cries in half an hour, 'Initiators of silence' are observed in order to locate the victims under the wreckage," Itar quoted an official from an emergency crisis center set up after the incident as saying.

Breathing instruments, some in barking suits, rushed inside the freezing temperatures after the glass dome caved in at 7:20 p.m. Moscow time.

"It has been definitely confirmed it was not an act of terror," the mayor told reporters outside the complex in south-western Moscow. "The moment when the roof caved in was recorded by video cameras." Moscow has been in a deep chill a fourth ripped through a packed metro train on Feb. 6, killing at least 40 people. President Vladimir Putin, who faces re-election next month, blamed Chechen rebels for the attack.

A Moscow public spokesman said part of the roof collapsed under the weight of piles of snow which collected on top of the giant glass dome after days of heavy snowfall.

Dozens of people, many children among them, were rushed to hospitals with broken limbs, head injuries and bruises while rescuers climbed in four-wheel-drive vehicles and began to comb the debris.

Hundreds of people were evacuated into the street shortly after the accident and relatives of those injured or possibly trapped soon joined them, shouting over the wind.

Moscow Prosecutor Nikolai Ivanov told reporters law enforcement officials had begun an investigation of the accident.

The complex, widely advertised around Moscow, can take up to 2,000 visitors and has three pools, including one for children, and a river-like water pool. /Reuters

RESCUERS work among the debris after the Transvaal water park roof collapsed in Moscow, early morning, Feb. 15. The vast glass roof covering the Transvaal water park collapsed Saturday evening.

Asia's dirty air can hop to US West

SEATTLE, Washington—Though each country regulates its own air quality, the fact is that pollution knows no boundaries, and dirty air from Asia can easily hop the Pacific to pollute the western United States, experts have say in calling for a global pollution solution.

At present-day pollution From Asia can cross the ocean in a matter of days, with the main effect on the quality of air on the US West Coast, Daniel Jaffe, an environmental specialist at the University of Washington, Friday told the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The markest effects of this evangelization, he said, are an increase in the levels of ozone and fine particulate matter, well over limits set by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Asian pollution can cross the Pacific on winds fed by a low pressure system over the Aleutian Islands off southwestern Alaska and a high pressure system near Hawaii in mid-Pacific, the combination of which propels Asian air masses to the US West Coast on an average of "a high-speed conveyor belt."

"It's quite from a geophysical curiosity to a point where we can note say that, 'Yes, this one or large enough levels occasionally that it can affect your air quality'," said Jaffe.

Mary Dzibak, an international relations specialist at the University of Washington, said pollution generated in one country increasingly impinges on neighboring countries, but in some cases, countries themselves suffer unfairly.

"There is no one magic solution to international environmental problems," she said. "I believe actions need to be taken at all of these levels." Brass pointed to a current collaboration among Japan, South Korea, the United States and Canada to monitor pollution levels in China to predict when harmful pollution can impact on other countries, and to alert the countries and governments. /AFP

Sweden may offer abortion haven to foreign women

STOCKHOLM—While many countries debate whether abortion should be legalized, Sweden, which already has one of the world's most liberal abortion laws, may loosen restrictions even further by allowing non-residents access to the procedure.

The Scandinavian country has since the mid-1970s offered free abortions up until the 18th week of pregnancy—no questions asked—making it one of the world's most liberal countries on the issue.

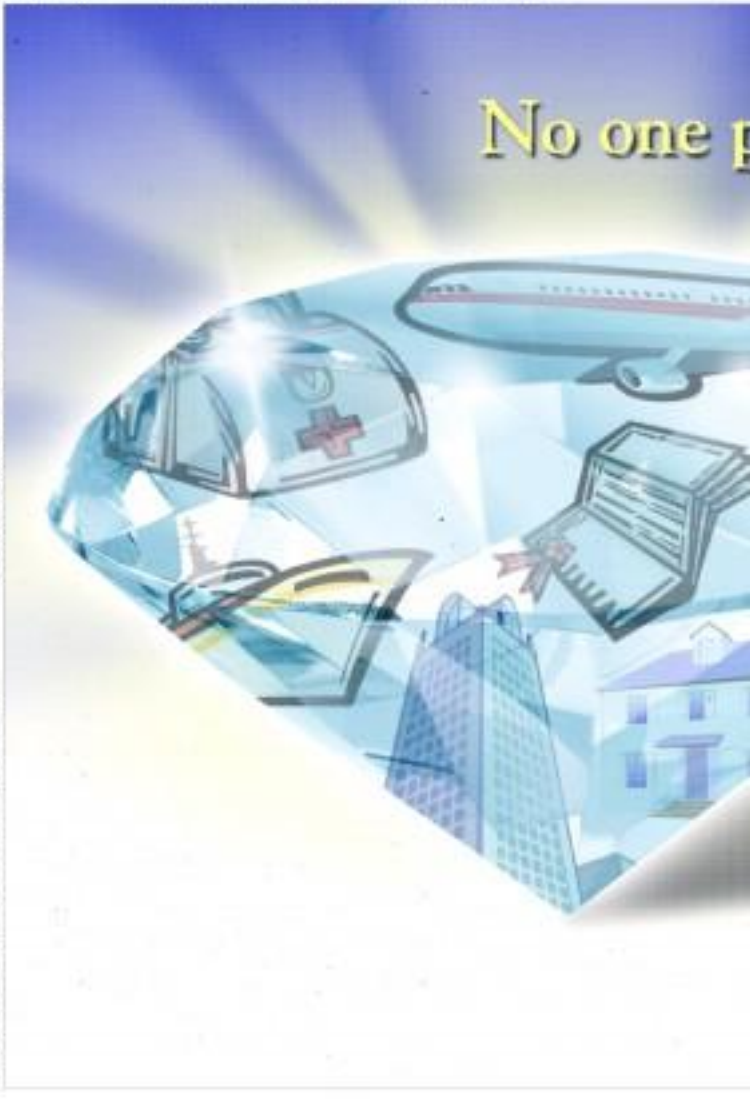
All of Sweden's Nordic neighbors, which are also considered liberal on the issue, have set the limit for abortions at 12 weeks.

But now access to the procedure has, until now, been restricted to Swedish citizens and residents only, either because the law is still too restrictive, and several government ministers have recently pushed to give non-residents the same right to abortions as women living in Sweden.

"I think this question is of the utmost importance. I feel that the right to decide over your own body is a human right that should be accorded to foreigners as well as Swedes," Gender Equality Minister Mona Sahlin told AFP.

Before Sweden had access to legal abortions at home, many desperate women travelled to Poland to get the procedure done there. Sahlin pointed out, adding the liberal laws in Poland at that time had helped speed up the process of liberalizing the laws in Sweden.

"One of the reasons we finally decided to permit abortions was that we realized how hypocritical it was to ban them here, and then look the other way as girls went to Poland to get them," she said. /AFP



Fund misuse scandal hits Canada gov't

OTTAWA — Public support for Canada's ruling Liberals has dropped sharply in the wake of a major financial scandal involving government misuse of funds, according to two opinion polls released on Saturday.

An Ipsos-Reid poll for the Toronto Globe and Mail and CTV showed backing for the Liberals among registered voters had fallen to 39 percent from 48 percent last month.

Until last week, aides to new Prime Minister Paul Martin had said he planned to call an election in May 19 to take advantage of the party's popularity. The new leaks has certain, especially if the fallout from the scandal continues.

Martin has been firmly on the defensive since a report on Tuesday revealed Ottawa had taken C$100 million ($76 million) from a sponsorship fund designed to promote national unity in French-speaking Quebec and given it instead to advertising firms closely tied to the Liberals.

"Outside of an election period I've never seen numbers move like this," said Ipsos-Reid President Darrell Bricker.

"This one is like a wildfire. It's out of control and everything the prime minister has done at this point has just blown the flames higher," he told the Globe and Mail.

The poll showed the opposition Conservative Party had risen to 24 percent from 19 percent last month while the left-leaning New Democrats edged up to 16 percent from 14 percent.

A separate CROP poll for Montreal's La Presse newspaper showed support for the Liberals in Quebec had dropped to 34 percent from 51 percent a month ago. The separatist Bloc Quebecois climbed to 47 percent from 33 percent.

The could be a small because said it now the Liberals have said that while they expect to lose ground in the next election in Ontario ... which accounts for 103 seats in Canada's 301-seat parliament—they were confident of making gains in Quebec.

If they to fare less seats in Quebec they could be looking at a minority government.

Martin has called a public inquiry into the scandal and vowed to crack down on those responsible. Reuters

WORLDBRIEFS

Kerry scores again

WASHINGTON — Sen. John Kerry cruised to easy wins in Democratic Party presidential caucuses in the western state of Nevada and the US capital on Saturday, snubbing his rivals in the battle for the right to face George W. Bush in November. The 60-year-old, four-term senator from Massachusetts polled 49 percent of the vote in Washington DC and 63 percent in Nevada, the gambling hub where he was the only candidate to make campaign appearances. Civil rights activist Al Sharpton finished second in Washington with 25 percent of the vote, followed by former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean with 11 percent and North Carolina Gen. Attorney Edwards with 10 percent. Former front-runner Dean, who is making his last-ditch bid for Tuesday's crucial primary in the northern state of Wisconsin, finished second in Nevada with 11 percent but trailed by Edwards with 30 percent. Kerry has won 14 of the 15 nominating contests held so far and is looking to deliver a potentially fatal blow to Bush's rule in the Wisconsin primary, which he is heavily favored to win. AFP

Aristide ouster sought

PORT-AU-PRINCE — A rival police chief and a paramilitary leader have joined an armed rebellion against embattled Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide, imperiling food supplies, officials said Saturday. The rare alliance makes more real than ever the threat that Aristide could be deposed for a second time. About 50 people have been killed since months began last week after Caribbean leaders failed to persuade a weakened Aristide to cede power and permit Stockholm. Gonaïves, the town's fourth-largest city of Gonaïves, where they were joined by former police commissioner Guy Philippe, fired after a 2000 coup attempt against Aristide, and paramilitary leader Louis Jodel Chamblain, accused of human rights violations under military dictator Raoul Cedras who was in power in 1991-1994. AFP

20 die in Pakistan quake

PESHAWAR — Twenty people died and dozens were injured after a severe earthquake and aftershocks hit northern Pakistan on Saturday, seismic research officials said. More than 100 homes collapsed in Pakistan's North West Frontier province after the quake, measuring 6.1 on the Richter scale hit at 3:28 p.m., followed by aftershocks measuring 5.5. The earthquake's epicenter was 200 km northeast of Peshawar, capital of the province bordering Afghanistan, seismologists said. "Some 20 people have died, including 10 in a passenger van when it was caught in a landslide in the northern town of Batgram," said Brig. Javed Cheema, head of the country's Relief and Crisis Management Cell. AFP

Chechen leader's death

GUDA — The leadership of the tiny Gud Arab state of Qatar has taken direct charge of an investigation into a car bomb that killed former Chechen President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, an official said on Saturday. The state-controlled Qatar satellite channel Al Jazeera said on Friday that the car explosion, which Qatari media said was an assassination, could occur in a country which prides itself on its security. A second blast later caused the blast, which hit an Yandarbiyev, a separatist guerrilla leader linked by Moscow to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida group, left a woman after a visit on Friday. Two people with him died and hospital officials said his 13-year-old son suffered extensive burns. Rebel Chechnya blamed Russia for Yandarbiyev's death, while Moscow and pro-Moscow Chechens said it resulted from an internal feud amongst the separatists. Reuters

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OPINION

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Disqualified

EDITORIAL

If a single series of statements is enough to disqualify a candidate for high office, opposition coalition standard-bearer Fernando Poe Jr. would need to find an immediate replacement for ex-secretary, ex-senator, ex-rule of law advocate Francisco Tatad. Granted, political rhetoric in the middle of a campaign is overheated, and Tatad, one of the unmoved candidates on Poe's Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino ticket, is one of those verbally gifted politicians who can be counted on to raise the temperature.

But his latest utterances on the campaign trail, aired in Marbella, Bataan, have clearly crossed the line between mere sensationalism and sanity. After the Supreme Court denied Poe amici curiae in comment on the citizenship cases filed against Poe, Tatad claimed to see a conspiracy. "We are afraid that they are preparing the stage for something sinister."

Tatad, who famously read the proclamation of martial law on television in September 1972, is not a lawyer, but surely he knows enough about the law to know that an institution to endorse lawyers to serve as the Supreme Court's "friends of the court" is a hallowed tradition. Only last November, the high court listened to oral arguments presented by some of the country's best lawyers on the vexing impeachment of Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. To suggest that the Supreme Court's invitation to four prominent lawyers last week was part of an elaborate scheme to justify an adverse decision already reached is therefore the height of irresponsibility.

He prefaced his remarks with weasel words that, properly analyzed, means his sourcing was triple hearsay at best. "There are reports in this effort that justices have been overheard to have said that they are ready to proceed against our candidate." Tatad's act of imagination violates a cardinal rule of fiction: the audience must be willing to suspend its disbelief. A cabal of justices saying out loud that they will vote "against" Poe, overheard by more than one opposition witness? This sounds like the fiction that Tatad's former student, the dictator and arch-lawyer Ferdinand Marcos, actually wrote all the books he was supposed to have written. Or that opposition leader Sen. Edgardo Angara has reinvented the first open-and-shut inquiry in the Senate's history. It's simply too convenient to be true.

In another interview in Bataan, Tatad said the opposition "cannot accept and we will not accept" a decision disqualifying Poe. He also told reporters: "I hope the justices of the Supreme Court, for the first time in three years, will follow the law and be an instrument of peaceful electoral process rather than something else." What he means is that, ever since the Supreme Court ruled unanimously, in two landmark cases, to confirm the legitimacy of the presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, he and other loyalists of deposed President Joseph Estrada do not accept the legitimacy of the high court itself. If the Supreme Court itself does not "follow the law," then why would a man like him follow the court?

Her—and like-any self-taught, self-made man for whom circumstance is stronger than conviction, there is always far Tatad the inevitable bar—if the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Poe, for and that part of the opposition he cry-reasons would accept the ruling.

The hypocrisy in Tatad's position is breathtaking. The rule of law requires every citizen, among other responsibilities, to heed judicial decisions whether those are favorable or adverse. To follow only those that favor us is to encourage contempt for the law and thus, inevitably, to court lawlessness itself.

That is, in fact, the scenario that Tatad sketched in Bataan for anyone to hear: "I would not be able to prevent anything because I don't believe the masses who have expressed intense support for FPJ will take this sitting down." And yet again: "If we are deprived of our presidential candidate due to reasons which I believe are totally unacceptable, then we would not be in a position to impose our will on our people in the grassroots."

Blackmail, in other words. It is the last resort for those who have run out of arguments. It is also the latest proof, but not the last, that Tatad has disqualified himself from ever serving in a republic.

A formula for chaos

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

If Gore stated like "political falsehood," but we shouldn't take lightly the warning that civil disobedience and anarchy may erupt if opposition presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr. is disqualified. Common sense says that we shouldn't join such mob actions, but remember also it is the boisterous mass who will be very emotional and lose common sense and control if their idol is disqualified. After all, they think they have nothing to lose and everything to gain in case of anarchy. And it does seem rational if their idol is barred from the presidential race by reason of technicality. Fernando Poe Jr., if we all, has lived and worked all his life in the Philippines as a Filipino, was a qualified actor during all that time, and the Filipinos accepted him as such without question. But now that he is a very popular presidential candidate, and seemingly on the verge of winning, he is suddenly not a Filipino.

As comedy king Dolphy quipped during FPJ's proclamation rally, "Para akong isa-mandirmo, bata high along singing Isnik (That's why I don't want to be a candidate. I may suddenly become a Chinese)!"

It is also ludicrous that in the opposition side will take advantage of the time slept in Senate security. And there are elements in the military who are waiting for just such an opportunity; and, surely, the communist and Muslim secessionist rebels. Furthermore, Filipinos have learned they can depose sitting presidents with "people power." In fact, it has become a habit with them. So we can expect more people power in June/late—or even worse. Have the Supreme Court justices may in so risk, considering the surprise angst that a disqualification decision will create among FPJ supporters.

But the law is the law, and the justices will decide the case as they think the law intends. And so if they decide against FPJ, we have a mandate for chaos.

But I don't buy the rumor that the GMA appointed justices have already decided for disqualification—even before they have heard the oral arguments and read the learned opinions of the "friends of the court" they have invited. And although I am not a lawyer, I am confident that the high court will throw out the appeals and petitions for disqualification because the facts, the laws and jurisprudence are heavily in favor of FPJ.

What's more, the evidence presented by the Fenton brothers was ruled by the Senate committee that investigated the case as manufactured and falsified. The brothers have not been able to prove otherwise. In short, there is no evidence to speak of against FPJ. In fact, the senators have recommended the criminal prosecution of National Archives director Ian Jeanet Ricardo Manapat for "falsification of public documents."

But the lawyers who went up to the Supreme Court are using the evidence presented by FPJ's lawyers themselves—the marriage certificate of his parents, and FPJ's birth certificate. These show that 1922 was born before the marriage. Therefore, they argue, FPJ is illegitimate. Under the citizenship of his mother, Bessie Kelly, who is an American. Ergo, FPJ is an American and not a natural-born Filipino and is therefore not qualified to run for president of the Philippines.

FPJ's lawyers argue that his grandfather, a Spanish citizen living in the Philippines, became a Filipino by virtue of the Treaty of Paris, and the Philippine Bill of 1902. Therefore his son, Fernando Poe Sr., FPJ's father, was a Filipino. Ergo, FPJ is himself a Filipino.

But FPJ will be born out of wedlock and, therefore, being illegitimate, he cannot take the citizenship of his father, argue the prosecutors.

Yes, but the subsequent marriage of his parents made him legitimate. Even if the marriage comes after the birth, legitimacy retroacts to the date of birth of the child, according to the law and jurisprudence. In case of doubt, legitimacy is decided in favor of the child because the laws were made precisely to protect the innocent children.

Furthermore, the 1935 Constitution which was in force when FPJ was born, provides that a child born of a Filipino father takes the citizenship of his or her father. It does not distinguish between a legitimate and an illegitimate child. Therefore, a child with a Filipino father is a Filipino, whether or not he or she was born out of wedlock.

But of course the Supreme Court can rule otherwise. It can even reverse itself. It is said that lawyers, and especially justices, can make a straight line crooked and a crooked line straight, or make black look black and white white. This is why there is so much conflict in the world, why court dockets are clogged, and why lawyers get rich. The laws and jurisprudence are confusing and contradictory and need lawyers and judges to interpret them. The law is finally what the Supreme Court says it is even if it contradicts an earlier decision.

And there lies our danger.

* * *

The three-day deadline imposed by the Commission on Elections for national candidates to remove their illegal posters, streamers and billboards expired yesterday. It was also the deadline by ruling the grace period for the comelec of Edsa and Quezon Avenue. But the billboard of independent senatorial candidate Heherson Alvarez remained undisturbed.

And illegal posters are still everywhere, including those of President Macapagal-Arroyo which are not allowed. Are we poised to wind, or were around the Quezon Memorial Circle near the Quezon City Hall. What are the Comelec and Metro Manila Development Authority doing?

Sword of Damocles

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

THERE is one, a man God Damocles. Upon their's never an where hung it hangs.

The seemingly obvious target is Fernando Poe Jr. It has been the rumor last week, the justices of the Supreme Court has already made the question of his nationality, and voted against him, though by a slim margin. The Supreme Court has of course vehemently denied the rumor, saying it's nowhere near a decision yet. But I would seriously urge the justices now in Circle Municipal Acinyo, chief of their Tony Carpio, to inhibit themselves on this case. Their participation in it, however unintended, will make the fire of arrest.

I have immediately heard of the reasons, too, and has taken a considerate stance. "They are mistaken to what they are doing to me," he said in a campaign rally last week. "If they persist in it, they may run out the light of day" for said. Ah, of course, in Hollywood language, Filipino, the language of his mother, the language of the audience, the language of his country, except Cebu. The language of, well, whether it is the land of his birth or not, that is the question.

I don't know that he will be cited for meeting campaign rules, but I gathered were one of the law-making Benitez-Henriquez and company against frustrating rebellion by their mortal, my comment. Apparently, Mendoza is of, have been watching that a linguistic ruling by the Supreme Court on FPJ's citizenship would drive the people to the streets. That was unnecessary to address, the men of the bar said.

Well, now they have the words straight from the horse's—or the Pandacan's—mouth. "Sabi daw ng mga abogado ang issue" is not a requisite citizen. The people who are eager to vote him into office are not interested in nationality, are always up to date him with changes of address, too.

But, first, is there a possibility the Court will declare him to be the natural of such citizen?

Clearly this case is not just a legal one, it is also—indeed primarily so—a political one. It's on his second reason. Not the least of which is that it is being decided right smack in the campaign period, and right in the face of FPJ leading the pack, we get by means outrage and the want of his hands. The last are being hoped by handshakes. By means how you slice it, a decision against FPJ will be seen as a political ploy engineered by GMA and executed by his men on the Supreme Court. I myself will believe it, by fault in the construction of reality, not least of them the Supreme Court, having gone out of the window long ago. The Supreme Court after all, where GMA appointees sit.

There are of course the legal or constitutional aspects of the issue. But as the very least, even high school students know from their textbooks that the law and the Constitution are products of politics, not statistics, contains power and the sovereign will of the people. That was how GMA came to power in the first place, that is why its occupies her as President. Notwithstanding that she replaced a constitutionally sanctioned president, one unpopularly backed up by an overwhelming vote. It's by had lost his right to rule by virtue of gross abuse of authority, the people had spoken as Edsa.

We go by the letter rather than the spirit of the law, why we surely should we recognize GMA's claim, her grounds (the spirit of the law as well, why we rarely denounce usurpers Garcia? She has found the very thing that put her in power.

It is tempting to think that the GMA camp will just let the issue hang on FPJ's head rather than decide it in one way or the other, because she thinks a more powerful...or less dangerous—than the successor. But I personally would not put it past the government to go for broke. GMA has upped the ante on practically everything; she has lied since she came in, she is smearing the treasury to cling to power, she has appointed a couple of notorious characters and known supporters as Comelec commissioners, she has (I know) or to be believed) ordered her generals to make life hell for the other candidates. Why should she balk at getting rid of FPJ, the last one?

That presence of course that the Supreme Court can be swayed to Arroyo-Estrada's way of thinking. I have little doubt in that.

That's the scary part. Some friends have speculated that the Erap-PDP camp isn't exactly enamored with "people power"—"Edsa Dos" as a synonym of riot—and does not have a hold on the entire military officers. So its capability to mount popular protest of the kind that brought down Estrada and Erap is suspect. True, but there's another factor that makes the situation different from the Edsa days. Then, the most popular person in Manila Manila-ding. She was losing popular access before PEI declared his intention to run and threw the country into election mode, quite apart from challenges from Senators Pimentel and Roco. Now, FPJ's popularity with Cebu supposedly, the same four times anywhere about reelection and empire, underdog and overdog, has presaged both for us, you've got a combustible mix.

I repeat, I do not want FPJ to become the president of this country. I do not think he is qualified for the job. But I do not want him screwed in this way because the consequences for the country will be horrendous. My desire is to see some candidates win or lose where by the people have their choice they begin. The process is more important than the individual, how the candidate wins is more important than who wins. The public sees that an injustice has been done—and this is an injustice—God help us. Martial blood invoking the law to foment crisis and chaos is such where to go: nuts. Hell, look where it got us.

There is a sword of Damocles dangling in the air. It hangs on all of us.

Valentine reconciliation

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Bobbit Olivares-Cassiman

MEDIA reports had predicted that politics would play a big role in the 58th homecoming of the Philippine Military Academy alumni last Sunday, thanks to the prediction by no less than, as in the politicians-turned-coaches of the rules they had to play, starting with something like having backdrops that allowed some candidates to pass home coverage. President Macapagal-Arroyo attended it, not as guest speaker but as an adopted member of Class '78, accompanied by her husband Mike Arroyo, Executive Jose Miguel Arroyo, Jr., and as adopted members of the silver jubilarian Class of '74. That, while DAP-energized full-service as commander in chief, gamely cooping her hair to look like a general for the occasion, commented may, she did not deliver the keynote speech; that role was assigned to Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita who was the guest of honor. In fact, DAP was somewhat in all this thinking exclusive mean to the new members of the PMA Alumni Association.

* * *

The homecoming would have gone well long before the symbolic 58th and Silliman's labor, Dick Gordon's commencement and homecoming, to announce, edging the presence of MPs outside our name. Aside from the First Couple, he mentioned former President Fidel Ramos, Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, Rep. Ernesto Ordoñez of PMA members' Alumni, ranking commanders currently and new independent senatorial candidate Baldomero Minoza, adopted member of Class '67, Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza of Class '52, former Defense Chief Angelo Reyes of Class '69, and a number of other dignitaries. But he did not name senatorial candidates Mar Roxas, former trade secretary and an adopted member of Class '74, and Senate Minority, former senator and defense secretary.

But the man's serious omission was the failure to acknowledge presidential candidate Sen. Panfilo Lacson, Class '71. People in the audience, however, could see it. Medyo nagtaka or ignored Allan as saying he simply forgot or check whether Lacson was around, but some were quick to say it as a snub by DBH, when chances are, the star was here been drawn to see among the many hundreds spread out in the parade ground. Considering the sensitive area of any presidential, Allan should have been more thorough in verifying Lacson's presence.

* * *

Lacson, many in a grey running suit, had his fill going for photos with families of the alumnus the first, with Cielo, dressed in the running suit of her adopted class, had her own share accommodating some jubilarians at the grandstand. But that afternoon she made up for her lack of appearance to meet with some alumni when she hosted a cocktail party for them on the sprawling grounds of the Malacañang house, before waiting to her summer residence for a private luncheon dinner with her host. Until 1 month her Class mates were reunited with the military crowd that, once before, recently greeting people and posing for photos; in her retrospect seeing that she received the presidency into PMA's alumni group to join its members and now in her own administration, she vowed to visit she didn't hold back. Noting that "after all its calls people return already," she selected the alumni "not to forget the election on May 10," but stopped short of asking for their vote.

* * *

As the grandstand, former Army Chief and Defense Secretary Fortunato Abat, Class '55, spoke up to the lady's ear, Lacson's wife Linda, seated by the table. Abat recently made news again when he led a number of signatories in a full-page ad in this paper exhorting a no-election scenario and the setting up of a civil-military junta to replace the current government. Was there rather he had complained about how the military authorities had cancelled the convention to mark the death anniversary of his class mate Gen. Victor Corpus? Abat said that the Corpus camp turned down the notice that the biggest one got to was that the aging general showed up at 8:00h cocktail party and when she arrived, he seemed to have no aside his ambitious advocacy and now to serve her and concerned her personal life. Lacson, however, kept back at him. They were the epicenter of all years, and Secretary Ermita later upbraided this columnist that it cannot be anything but a "distortion reconciliation."

* * *

Ermita address, Ermita recalled the role that the country's premier military institution played in his early life as well as in the lives of its countless alumni—"dangal, katarun" by the Philippine Military Academy in a "transformation—cool and complete." Ermita pointed out that many alumni had distinguished themselves not just in the military realm but also in the civilian sphere, even as he urged them to continue to help in the task of nation-building in this "political crossroads" of our history by reminding the alumni that they are "military professionals whose reputation and interest are tied to the welfare of the people," and who must continue to act with relevance to the life of the nation by being the "key stabilizing force of Philippine society." But Ermita couldn't help but jab at the "democratic backbone of the nation—of Congress, of the executive, of schools, he noted, as one from the hallowed institutions itself.

He reminded the alumni that their role was at the nation's mobilizing force may be put to its "acid test" next year, as the PMA will be among the people that the elections in May. Out job, he stressed, is "to safeguard the electoral process so that the sanctity of our country. The armed forces will defend and keep this republic regardless of the cost, and keep this republic regardless of the cost, and people, which means to defend but without following his terms, the defense chief cautioned the alumni: "Don't forget to vote. And vote wisely."

Wrong info about former DOJ head

READERS' ADVOCATE

Raul J. Fabiñera

Last Feb. 1, the inquirer reported on its front page ("High court scolds Sabit's case pursue") the Supreme Court's reprimand of lawyer Marcial D.T. Bulgos, the examiner in the 2003 bar exam, for negligence in the handling of the test questions assigned to him that year.

The lawyer forced the tribunal to disregard the results of the examination in commercial law. It later confirmed the allegation of the percentage points attributable to that subject in the other seven bar subjects.

The Inquirer's news story described Bulgos as "a law partner of former Executive Secretary Bernardo Perez." The succeeding paragraphs made references to his standing as senior partner of the Bulgos and Perez law office.

A lawyer from Dipse City Dumo del Rio questioned the manner by which the report was made. He wrote: "As a daily PCIJ reader, I know this to say. We, nationals do it. But a respectable broadsheet like PDI should be above unnecessary sensationalism, such as your Pets. 1 headline. It was totally unfair and unwarranted to tag former DOJ Secretary Bernardo 'Bunot' Perez in the last-name imbroglio.

"In fact, nowhere in the body of the article is Bunot even implicated, whether directly or indirectly. So, it was his name that was splashed on the headline. Hey, O.T. Bulgos is a widely known surname in legal circles to have carried the headline. Why exclude him? Or, as an issue, is not even an accountable public official anymore? Surely, we readers expect more from PDI than this."

Wrong person

When asked to comment on the complaint, the editor in chief said Bulgos may be known to the legal circles, but outside of that "who's he?" By identifying him as former Justice Secretary Perez's law partner, the Inquirer merely gave an idea of who he is. That he is a big-time lawyer who should have known better than to do an act that he was reprimanded for by the tribunal.

She further explained that Bulgos has not been accused of any crime—not negligence in leaving his computer open to snoopsmithing by just about anyone who had access to his room.

Unfortunately, the news in question is inaccurate. Bulgos is not a law partner of Atty. Perez. The latter resigned from the law office in 2001 when he was appointed as the justice department's top lawyer by President Gloria Arroyo. He did not resume his professional ties with his former law partners after his stint in the Cabinet in 2003.

The "Perez" in the "Bulgos & Perez law office" mentioned in the news refers to Atty. Bonifacio Perez, not to Atty. Perez. The latter is a labor law expert who worked for years in the International Labor Organization before engaging in the private practice of law.

Had the reporter who wrote the news made an effort to look up the telephone directory and call the law office to verify the facts, he would have learned of the true identity of that "Perez" and avoided the error in the news story.

And even if Atty. Perez were a law partner of Bulgos, I think it was inappropriate to mention his professional relationship with Bulgos in reporting the disciplinary action subject of the news. He correctly pointed out in the letter, there was nothing in the report indicating that Perez had committed any wrong in the act that, with Bulgos' failure to safeguard the integrity of the test questions he prepared for the 2003 bar exams.

Labels

The fact that Bulgos does not enjoy the same level of public recognition as Perez does not justify the latter's inclusion in the report. The story stress Bulgos and the culpability of the members of his staff who leaked the questions to some examinees was newsworthy enough without having to bring Perez into the picture. The indignant of Perez's name did not add anything to the substance of the story.

The editor cited the news maxim where "labels" or references to past associations cannot be avoided when the newspaper reports on the activities of some public figures. The addition of a description given the readers a better understanding or appreciation of the actors' statements subject of the news.

It is natural, however, that the public tend to be reluctant to hear a hearing on what the public personality is reported to have done or said. Failing in that standard, the news report would look like a gossip item.

Thus, if the subject of the news is the unexplained arrest of a high-ranking government official who is a member of a political party, reference to his close associations with the late President Ferdinand Marcos during those dark days in our history is justified; his omission would make the news incomplete.

Following the same principle, it would be improper to mention lawyer Jaeller Mendoza in the latest divorce and adultery case of el Shaina in a news report about Mendoza's handling of the disqualification case against presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr. Mendoza's past services to Shaina have no relevance or materiality to his present legal services to Poe.

For the Poems cited earlier, the incorrect apologies for the error. It regrets whatever wrong impressions the story may have caused the affected parties and the readers.

* * *

The reader's advocate may be reached at the following address: "The Readers' Advocate" c/o Philippine Daily Inquirer, Chino Roces Avenue corner Yague and Mercantile Streets, Makati City. Or through fax nos. 897-4193 to 94, or readersadvocate@inquirer.com.ph.

New cultural find in Butuan

KRIS-CROSSING MINDANAO

Antonio J. Montalbron II

THE MAR is a law unto himself. That is probably one of the views that can be said of anyone, by alone a government official aspiring to become a member of the Philippine Senate. That was probably the reason as to why Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago, some candidate BOB Gordon in the uproar over the Lopez-Lapu-Lapu recently put up in Rizal Park.

Gordon has since answered the charges made against him by Defensor-Gordon's friends Senator Santiago, a one-time rival of the latter in Democrat business. But the fact remains that a few of the land, in this case Presidential Decree 1505, remains such until either who repealed or amended, a detail that must be recognized by aspirants to candidacy.

Gordon probably missed the definition of the controversial clause for his failure try the when further during as well that this has to happen when Filipino voters must discuss the situations and issues that affect their lives and not those involving the law, aspire to become beneficiary. But when the book, six theories are a cautious anyway and with all the political prestressing going on, nothing shocks us anymore.

Incidentally, Gordon's candidacy for the senate, can take note, however, that there are to fight upon in heritage advocacy and that happens only when local governments follow the law on heritage preservation.

Take the case of our veteran Board member was a recent performer first in Butuan City that, as a result for heritage-rich Butuan, also another paradigm for close private sector and government collaboration.

Butuan's Balangay Shell Museum is a mound of shells running up to 100 meters deep occupying an area of about half a hectare in Barangay Bonbon, therefore City Hall but there is a unsolved mound, although smaller. At the moment, materials found in the site are undergoing carbon dating analysis in Japan. But National Museum archaeologists who recently made an in-depth study of the site are of the somewhat proposition that the materials go back to Late Stone Age. That effectively pushes back in time the cultural chronology of Butuan's early settlement, and eventually other data on Philippine history is to be succeeding find.

The process that, however, stands in the way of "progress" for those who wish to make it appear that development and culture are in conflict with each other, that one must give way to the other. The planned Butuan City-international road, which is already in the final processing stages, will pass right through this Mindanao site.

When the Butuan Historical and Cultural Foundation sounded the alarm of the possible destruction of Mindoro, the city government reportedly ordered the cutting of trees in the surrounding mass of Bilgaon hood. And with funding from the city government—how fortunate Butuan's historians are!—the foundation called in the National Museum to do the real drills. With the help of Japanese experts from Kyushu U, the real dredging started to uncover Mindoro, the deepest of its deterioration but proved, but "just in time," says Butuan historian Eloy Hornedo, whose book must soon publication, "Butuan of a Thousand Seas," will pave the way for the Shell Museum.

The National Museum must therefore that the site is not a natural formation. Aside from hatchmarks and hundreds shells, the excavations yielded stone flake tools that hint traces of humans in the area. Also found were fragments of human and animal bones, by the hundreds, two human skulls (long bones of the arms) and parts of the head are in Japan for C-14 analysis.

Our good news from Butuan doesn't end with the discovery of the road and the museum's findings. The city is now in navigation to open City Library building where the local government and Rep. Lourdes Romualdez assigned a room for the planned Romualdez-Hornedo Studies Center.

The center will house a collection of books and research materials that will surely be useful in writing scholars and researchers. Already, the initial collection includes the private research materials of the late Romualdez matriarch Soledad Romualdez which are all sourced from abroad. Also from Europe, libraries and archives on Spanish documents gathered by Fr. Antonio Medina, and notes of old political leaders and figures significant to Butuan. The library will also entertain studies on Butuan done elsewhere in their years, including the geomorphological study of the Butuan delta. There will also be copies of all archaeological studies done in the province, including Butuan.

At site can see, it is not only Butuan's public historians who are sowing the example here, but also local governments officials appreciating high. In the valuable remnants of heritage education in the development of projects. Thus, the officials are safely doing their duty, but with the motivation valuable by some jewel-hunters people (misinspired by the apathy of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo from whom, after being scandalous on the Lanao, the administration is now trying to save herself. Butuan's example provides a lesson.

"Positivity means jobs. Marketing of culture pays as Filipinos," Those language acquisitions in time. But development issues are only for all environmentalists—also for a government that recommends and hence, can energize development efforts. What better development there can be than to Filipinos having better education on and understanding of their own identity and heritage? Culture can be a powerful weapon in any kind of war.

How are side there is such a thing as a heritage vote in the coming election. Now Butuan!

* * *

Comments to inwood@inq.ph

The risks of democracy

THE LONG VIEW

Manuel L. Quezon III

I HAVE heard serious, bright and sincere people talk about sanctioning restrictions on the right to suffrage. The supporters says that an electorate that is increasingly insolvent and politically immature is a danger to the republic. That is why this will give a chance for skilled and competent leaders to make a difference and improve everyone's lives, including the lives of the poor. Benevolent and honest educated, and eventually lose will be happy if this view was just being peddled by elderly, well-to-do and wealthy people in wouldn't surprise me. What surprises me is that this view isn't all that rare among intellectuals of the younger generation. When someone is under the age, who don't remember life before martial law law are old enough to remember the parliament of the sewers of the early 1980s.

This is a dangerous and offensive way of thinking, and it is wrong. It is completely unjustified. When a nation or subgroup, the only way to win back the right is to re-establish a democracy, and all dictatorships are temporary in nature. The right of suffrage is the surest cause you open the floodgates, it is difficult to reinstate. It can be done, but at what cost? Intellectuals who will tell you that democracy is inexcusable have to be naive.

If, as Napoleon said, an army marches on its stomach, the electorate votes on its stomach, too. Therefore, "you have to educate people" is a simplistic cure for a majority of the population in poor and uneducated, the concerns of the percentage of the population for whom hunger is the paramount concern at each turn, and for whom everything seems impossible, are what will determine the outcome of elections. With the elected leaders and dictators of Burma understood the fundamental requirements of leadership when they made, ruined their populations—and then, authority—by giving the British masses, or plebes, bread and circuses. A kind [and less cynic-world-ful] people can

Continued on page A18

a calm people, but it is not enough to keep people from being hungry (because are people because they have imagination, and the imagination must be fed, even as the animal part of us is kept content by having enough to eat.

Perhaps the wealthy and middle classes have learned to devote imagination from leadership; this may explain why so many businessmen and executive types serve as touring and homebrew. But seriously, what I mean is that leadership, in the sense of governance, is the work of economic classes, is defined more by measurable skills than by personal characteristics such as charisma and humor. The result is that effective, capable—dour-ing—leadership is measured according to rules widely different under by those classes and that majority of the people. Hence the elite (my definition of out elite is very catholic: anyone with a management position and above, or who is a professor or a journalist, belongs to the elite, which is why it amuses me to see people who belong to the elite refer to "the masses" as the elite, because they're running about themselves).

How do we can explain the entire top-to-bottom of, say Fidel Ramos and the enduring illusion of say Joseph Estrada among the wealthy and middle classes? Consider that there is the fairly prevalent view among the members of these classes that "look how we create that overthrew Ferdinand Marcos. If someone assumes look now are crooks, and are prone for the sins of Ramos and doesn't regret the fall of Estrada, the elite conclusion? I say there is that more crooks are more representable than others, the kind of hypocrisy that is particularly bitter on those logical. So, you would expect our "best and brightest" to have both, if they truly have crooks.

Anyway, the larger point is that there is also, only a difference in the way our business and academic leaders measure the "proper" kind of leadership the country needs, which is why Ramos, intelligence, efficient, humorless and unimaginative, remains popular, while Estrada, whose flaws was never popular with the broader public, and why Estrada, emotionally not not most, he made intelligent, spoke a man of vices, but with instinct and the common touch, continues to be held in affection by so many.

The current presidential contenders for the presidency indicates that the public is looking for intelligence, efficiency, determination, the common touch and strength of will, in one leaders. I believe the surveys reveal an informed electorate, and that the public is looking for practical technicals of various regimes when it comes to how they measure leadership. Those who value experience and hard work gravitate toward the Numbers; those who expect leaders to possess property trust Sen. Panfilo Lacson; those who value regional sensitivity and sensitivity to inequity want Raul Roco; those who want a leader they understand prefer Fernando Poe Jr.

The risk of having a democracy is that it is all about numbers. The people is more the most comfortable with the idea of having a president. But if that's the case, the 1969 election results validate what I've long held: the supposed thinking and allegedly competent classes still remember the past that as it happens those classes. The thing is, the poor have more in common with each other than the educated, middle, and rich have in common with each other: they may represent 60 percent of voters, but it is 60 percent too many, it is some, for its own good.

* * *

Comments or feedback at mail@quezon.ph

THEY SAID

Malacañang quest

"I think the results I have so worked are immodest in Malacañang was that I knew I was just a guest. I would not in love forever, my vote was very simple. 'Oh?'

—The late President Corazon Aquino on her decision to stay in Malacañang's farmhouse rather than in the main palace

THE INQUIRER is a member of the PHILIPPINE PRESS INSTITUTE

Signs of corruption in a media person

THE reader-to-your interesting editorial, "Media matters," (PDI, 2/5/04)

To your question: "Does the media have the power to determine who the country's next president is?" my answer is a big No.

We know that candidates and their handlers will spend huge amounts of money to win the elections, including corrupting media people, particularly in TV and radio.

You don't have to be an expert to know that when TV and radio people mention not once but many times the names of some candidates, this is an indication that the broadcasters are on the payroll of the candidates. That is why these should also be a lifestyle check on media people.

In Australia and many countries, there is no such thing as entitlement journalism. This is because all journalists get the same pay from all the newspapers, TV and radio stations. That is, one pay for all who belong to the same media positions/organizations. And they all belong to one media labor union.

Print media people, particularly columnists, can easily be detected if they are on the payroll of candidates/politicians. They mention their names almost every time in their columns.

—OSCAR B. LEDESMA,
1 Condesita Court,
Yeppoon Point,
4701 Q'ld., Australia

LETTERS

The press and the strong republic

THE PRESS—print media—should do its part in the building of a strong republic.

The news report, "Crimes in top uniform pull off robbery" (PDI, 1/31/04) of Edson Tandoy Jr. was a case of irresponsible reporting. The 16th paragraph of the article read as follows: "But investigators could not yet ascertain if the three robbers in uniform were just pretending to be cops, or were actual. In policemen."

With all due respect, I submit that the paragraph was not necessary to complete the news report. It just exacerbated the negative image of the police. The very few men in uniform who find their way outside the law enjoy that kind of reporting to the great prejudice of the many who have devoted their lives in zealously protecting the citizenry.

Certainly, Tandoy's style of journalism in reporting will not help in the building of a strong republic.

—LUIS A. ILAGAN JR.,
7 Ballpoint St., Lipa City 4217

THE 10TH paragraph Luis Ilagan Jr. referred to in his letter was inserted in the story.

The story was about 30 men—three of whom were in police uniform with Caloocan City Police patches—who robbed a furniture factory. The logical question: How come they were wearing uniforms? The investigators were not sure. That's what I wrote in the 10th paragraph.

I included this information in the story because I did not want my readers to be misled into believing that the robbers were indeed police officers. If I were to omit the possibility of some readers thinking the robbers or uniform were indeed cops, what editor would be thinking that way? Or, when in fact nothing was certain yet.

I stand by my work.

—EDSON C. TANDOY JR.,
PDI reporter

The truth and law are on NHI side

THE DEFENSIVE and self-serving letter of Ms. Carissa D. Gonzalez, "Gordon is no lawbreaker," (PDI, 2/13/04) shouldn't be dignified with a reply but the half-truths peddled there need to be clarified to dispel the perception that our column "Gordon's latest folly" (PDI, 1/16/04) was inaccurate or unfair.

First, we didn't comment at length on the much-reviewed infamous Light and Sound show out of deference because our reviewers, as consultant, were contracted by the Philippine Tourism Authority during the project's initial stages. Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon did not heed the suggestions made, verbally and in writing, to the tourist group, thus, the National Historical Institute and I distanced ourselves from the project. Later, Gordon tried to hide under the skirt of the former History Department that disowned the show in its final form. Entries 1/24/04).

It is unfortunate that Gordon insists to no voice but his own. In an inspiring session he should be hearing others.

More pathetic is the attempt to make us share the blame for Gordon's misinterpretation of history. Gordon claims we could not be contacted. While we were abroad from April to November of last year, our e-mail as well as that of the NHI's continued to receive messages and calls. Our log will prove that Concelbida was not doing her job. PEO was also unable to contact us through e-mail, snail mail or land phone when Gordon's secretary "Globe" and Undersecretary Evelyn Panlilio always got through! Instead of shifting the blame to others, perhaps, Gordon should explain to the public why a project with an initial budget of P75 million ended up wasting P176 million with poor results.

Second, Concelbida claims the controversial Lapu-Lapu monument on Rizal Park is legal because the NHI chair did not protest. PD 1505 is very clear to anyone who understands simple English. Any alteration on a declared historical landmarks site requires prior written permission from the NHI chair. We challenge Gordon to produce this basic requirement. He has been twice requesting the NHI's intervention; these cannot be taken as permission. On Jan. 5, 2004 Gordon was asked to stop.

The NHI welcomes a statue of Lapu-Lapu provided it is erected outside an area declared as a historic site. Gordon, like a spoil, responded by erecting a cast statue between the basement of Rizal versus Lapu-Lapu. Lest we forget, Rizal is buried under the monument, this is why the park is dedicated to him and other martyrs who literally fertilized the area with their blood.

The NHI may not have the benefit of Gordon's PR machinery and unethical staff who follow him blindly. All the NHI holds is the memories are the truth and the law. All the empty noise Gordon makes will not make his unwanted monument in Rizal Park legal.

—ARMETTE C. OCAMPO,
chair, National Historical Institute, T.M. Kalaw Street,
Ermita, Manila

Stop name-calling

THIS is an appeal to stop name-calling by candidates and to raise the level of political discourse in the country's national and local elections.

The recent statement of Brig. Gen. Victor Corpus describing opposition vice-presidential candidate Loren Legarda as a "political prostitute" has made us, concerned women of Philippine society, realize that there is a need to campaign for sobriety and high ethical standards in the conduct of the forthcoming national and local elections.

The current low level of political behavior needs to be changed. Legarda does not deserve to be labeled as such. Well-informed voters of our society know this woman to be intelligent and competent, gender-sensitive and responsible, a pragmatic-thinking person possessing effective negotiating skills, and known for her high level of performance as a senator of the Philippines.

Now, more than ever, Filipinos who have been deprived of a meaningful electoral process, should come together and raise the level of political discourse and conduct.

May we appeal to all concerned, especially to the political parties, candidates, campaign spokespersons, civil society organizations, the electorate, etc. to initiate a positive discourse characterized by substantive platforms and talented speeches.

We believe that the Filipino can think and are able to discern the truth, to separate the chaff from the grain, and be empowered in the process. We owe it to our country to do the best we can to build a more mature citizenry and electorate. This is the only way the Philippines can come out strong on the road to development and prosperity.

—NELIA SONORO, LEILA SALGADO, MARIBELLE BOLO-EDING, DIANA CLA, MONICA AVIA, CRISY CORARRUBIAS, KERSTIN RUPPEL MARTINON SALCEDO, Concerned Women for a Meaningful and Substantive Political Discourse,
manapol_2004@yahoomail.com

Lady Falcons close in on softball crown

JOSHS Carnegie spun a one-hitter and Lovely Pershing Gobrial a role-home run as Adamson shut out Ateneo Tomas, 3-0, Saturday to Game 1 of their best-of-three duel for the Mrh University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP) women's softball crown at the UST field.

The Lady Falcons, bidding for a fifth straight, bettered UST pitcher Esmeralda Ysaig for five hits in an amazing turnaround for a team the Lady Tigers had blanked twice in the double-round eliminations.

"The girls are confident. They have peaked at the right time," said Adamson head coach Roy Gutierrez. "We feel we will win it on Wednesday."

Pershing opened the second inning by smashing Ysaig's second pitch to left field for a solo homer. Cathy Funez followed with a walk, stole second and made it home for 2-0 when Jerlyn de Capoocan's grounder caused one of three errors of the Lady Tigers in the match.

With Carnegie keeping the Lady Tigers at bay, the Lady Falcons picked up in third run in the fifth through Che Ishizaki, who singled home Adamson skipper Hanis Athal from second.

Adamson tries to wrap up the title Wednesday with a determined squad of six rookies, five sophomores and one veteran.

Pacquiao sparmate gets title shot versus Valbuena

PACQUIAO

By Salvee L. Lagumbay, Contributor

IT'S official.

The recent International Boxing Federation super bantamweight title relinquished by Manny Pacquiao will be contested by top-ranked Venezuelan Jose Luis Valbuena and No. 5 Mexican Israel "Magnifico" Vazquez.

The New Jersey-based IBF had already given last Thursday the green light for Oscar De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions, which promotes Valbuena, to hold the fight with Vazquez on March 20 at the Grand Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles.

Pacquiao, through promoter Murad Muhammad, had officially abandoned the IBF belt last Jan. 15 to campaign in the higher featherweight class, where he is slated to challenge WBA/IBF champ Juan Manuel Marquez on May 22.

The 22-year-old southpaw Valbuena boasts of a 24-2-1 win-loss-draw record with 14 KOs, while Vazquez, a perennial sparmate of Pacquiao at the WBC Carol Gym, sports a record of 35-3 with 25 KOs.

Golden Boy Promotions had initially held talks with No. 1 Hector Acero, who turned down the offer to accept a purse of a possible club with Mexico Antonio Becerra in April.

No. 4 Hedal Rumonis also turned down the offer to fight Valbuena, as he is awaiting for his mandatory challenge of the rival WBC crowned being held by Mexican Oscar Larios.

Meanwhile, Pacquiao and boxing manager Rod Nazario are slated to leave for the United States on Feb. 20 to hold talks with Muhammad, HBO's Kenny Davis and Marquez promoter Bob Arum.

Reports said only Pacquiao's signature is needed for his duel with Marquez to be finally declared official.

Giant Eagle Ridge slates 1st club championship

THE EAGLE Ridge Golf and Country Club in Gen. Trias, Cavite, will stage its first ever club championship in April to set off another busy summer schedule for the country's biggest golf complex.

With its handicapping system already being set up through the Information Technologies Inc., Eagle Ridge project director Winfred Gil said the time is ripe for the club to determine who's the best in various skill levels of both genders.

The stroke-play qualifying rounds are scheduled on April 3-4, with the top eight players advancing to the quarterfinals where play shifts to match. The semifinals will be held on April 11 with the finals set on April 17.

The entire club championships will be played at the Nido course, one of the four 18-hole championship courses of Eagle Ridge, a joint venture project of Sta. Lucia Realty and Ahono Land Inc.

How to come in as a sponsor is Consolidated Insurance which will reward a hole-in-one first to all pars with a P100,000 prize.

Registration is now going on, with the deadline set on March 31.

RP pros out to break . . .

Story on page A-5

enjoy the stronge they're fully supporting the move of organizing National Golf Association of the Philippines to transfer the venue from Manila to Subic.

"I've seen the conditions at Mimosa myself and I believe that the venue is in the best interest of the Open," said Young.

Young has finalized with MGAP the holding of a special 18-hole qualifying for 30 slots on Friday, Feb. 20, at the Canyon course. The search for Open "ARMs" to open its gates and announce of all nationalities.

Interested players will have until Feb. 18, Wednesday, to register either at the MGAP or Mimosa.

There are 53 conditional exotics from 15 nations on the Asian Tour and most of them have expressed interest to join the event. The Professional Golfers Association of the Philippines will be allowed to field in the Top 20 players in its Order of Merit.

Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Bergonia

Roco allies threaten libel suit vs Biazon

By Jhermee Magallanes
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—Allies of presidential candidate Raul Roco did not only vow by fists but also threatened to file libel charges against Sen. Rodolfo Biazon for calling Roco a liar.

Lawyer Irene Mauricio, a senatorial candidate under Roco's ticket, said he would be filing libel charges against Biazon as soon as the latter starts campaigning here.

Former Cebu Gov. Emilio "Lito" Osmeña, another key supporter of Roco, also said it was Biazon who lied in the first place because he did not believe that Biazon was telling the truth when he told reporters that Roco's camp offered P20 million in order for him to go to the administration camp.

Roco, his running mate Herminio Aquino and his seven senatorial candidates were in Cebu on Friday up to Saturday to launch their campaign in the Visayas.

Biazon's team, accompanied by Osmeña, arrived in Bantayan Island Saturday morning from Lapu-Lapu City using a private helicopter and visited a school there.

From Bantayan Island, the group flew to Cebu City and went to some schools, including the Cebu State College of Science and Technology (CSCST), and the Basilica del Santo Niño.

In a press conference Friday noon at the Grand Convention Center here, Roco reiterated claims that he did not say any believe words against Biazon, nor did the incident because the expert was sacked.

"It's true that he told that he was offered P50 million. He also told me he did not accept, and that is when the bayonets said he did not accept," Roco said.

Osmeña, Roco added, lied because telling the truth is that Biazon was offered money because according to Biazon himself, he did not accept.

But Roco asked Biazon to explain what he means when he said that he (Roco) was lying because "it can be understood that Biazon really accepted the money."

"If he says I am lying, does it mean he accepted? So, where is the lie? That he did not accept? I think Biazon should explain. Because it is a little confused," he added.

Mauricio said Biazon's statement calling Roco a liar should be punished by the filing of libel charges.

He said he would file charges against Biazon because he did not only twist his own statement but also attempted to destroy the reputation of another.

Osmeña, for his part, said he believed that Biazon was not telling the truth when he first told Roco that he was being offered a huge sum of money by joining the administration ticket.

"He really wanted to be there [with the administration], and I believe [when he was offered P20 million, I think he was lying when he told us that...] I think he just wanted to be sure that he was going to be taken in by the administration," Osmeña said.

Pastor to walk across RP for peaceful polls

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—Dr. Silverio's Day Celebrations organizer Rev. Ernesto "Ernie" Garcia, known as the world's "Walking Man," started a month-long walk across the country to pray for peaceful elections and to avoid such goofiness in choosing the country's political leaders.

Garcia hopes to cover 67 kilometers in 26 days from Iloilo City to Manila and back. His "Walk of Love" also aims to count funds for the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) and to promote the country's tourist destinations.

"I will be praying for his guidance in electing the right candidates. Since we need leaders who seek God and truly serve the people and our dear environment in serving their selves first," said the 58-year-old pastor.

The proceeds of Garcia's walk for the PNRC will be used to buy an ambulance and support the awareness programs of PNRC, said Raul Gargantiel, PNRC administrator in Iloilo.

At least 35 chapters of the PNRC will coordinate Garcia's walk in the route he will be taking. The Department of Interior and Local Government and Tourism are also supporting the walk, said Gargantiel.

Garcia is known for walking in many parts of the world to pray for peace and draw attention to the plight of children especially in poverty-stricken and war-torn areas.

He has covered over 13,000 kilometers in various countries since he started walking for causes eight years ago.

For this walk, Garcia will travel along the mainland highway taking well-as-roll-off vessels between islands.

From Iloilo City Garcia will walk until Feb. 20 to Caticlan port in Malay, Aklan, passing towns of Barotac Nuevo, Dumangas, Pototan, Dingle, Jaro, Oton, Tigbauan, Guimbal, Miagao, Igbaras, Tubungan, Leon, Zarraga, Janiuay, Lambunao, Calinog, Passi City, Dumarao, Roxas City, Panay, Ivisan, Sapian, Dao, Pontevedra, Panitan, Cuartero, Dao, Dumalag, Tapaz, Jamindan

ARMM execs ink ₱900-M agreement for poor villagers

COTABATO CITY— Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) social fund project officials and mayors of nine municipal towns in Maguindanao on Feb. 6 signed a ₱900-million agreement to empower poor communities in the region.

Primex Marcello, ARMM social fund information specialist, said the agreement signed covers at least 500 villages of 36 Mindanao, Datu Paglas, Buluan and Guindulungan towns to be developed this year.

Under the agreement, Marcello said, the villages will be given ₱1.3 million for small-scale infrastructure and livelihood projects.

At the same time, the ARMM social fund project would ensure that project funds are released regularly.

The project for each village would include water supply and irrigation, warehouses and dryers, school buildings and tourism ports and road rehabilitation.

The ARMM social fund project, created in 2002 to help build a durable peace and reduce poverty in Muslim areas, has ₱33.6 million loan funding for five years from the World Bank.

The project's objectives are to promote and empower community participation among stakeholders who have been on opposing sides of the armed conflict in Mindanao; assist poor and conflict-affected communities with improved social and economic services; generate short-term, productive, and sustainable long-term employment; and improve local governance through increased transparency in decision-making and accountability for the use of public resources at the community level, the local government unit level, and at the level of ARMM. Rose-Mary T. de Guzman, PDI Mindanao Bureau

ROUNDUP

Drug dealers killed

[illegible] Two suspected illegal drug dealers were shot and killed in Barangay Dos here on Thursday. Supt. Randy Rivera, town deputy police chief, identified the victims as resident Ramon and Alfredo Mayuga. Rivera said the two drug suspects were killed by unidentified gunmen who trailed the two from their residence in Barangay Uno to Barangay Dos. The Mayuga brothers were reportedly walking to their friend's house when two men suddenly approached and shot them. **Ellaraan Virgen A., PDI Northern Luzon Bureau**

Best regional police

TUGUEGARAO CITY — The Philippine National Police Regional Office in Cagayan Valley has been cited as the best regional police office in the country by PNP Chief Gen. Jan Lemuel Soriano, regional police director, said the award was given to their anti-narcotic group's successful campaign against illegal drugs and robbery groups. The group netted several hundred illegal and the increase in crime solution efficiency to 67.7 percent, among others. Soriano said police operations resulted in the reduction of drug-affected villages in the region from 71 to 31. He said the police also busted 11 crime syndicates last year. **Sylvestre Tabile, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau**

Tourists robbed

DAVAO CITY — Unidentified men robbed two visiting Japanese tourists on board a tricycle in Barangay 23-C on Wednesday, police said. Brigadier General, 56, and Michael Maxim, 50, of Miramar Park, Western Australia, were here via Philippine Airlines on Wednesday morning. The two foreigners told police that a man who introduced himself as Rodolfo met them at the airport and that he already hired a van to take them to Tagum City, Singapore and Maxim said they were traveling for more than an hour when the van stopped on a secluded area. There, at least seven persons, armed with a rifle, handguns and bolos, met them. The men said the armed men immediately took their belongings and said surrounding to more than ₱100,000. **Ferdinand S. Zuasola, PDI Mindanao Bureau**

Gas station attacked

BAGUIO, Benguet — Armed men forced a gasoline station here and today night, police said. No one was reported hurt. Police said the suspects could be members of a group trying to collect money from the owners of the Petron gasoline station in Barangay Dalangin here. Reports said the suspects, who were armed with M-16 rifles and two handguns, attacked at 7:30 p.m. Friday. Police said the group went possibly fifteen. Sr. the gas station's manager, identified as [illegible] and a separate ₱20,000 monthly protection money. **Cornelio Reyes, PDI Central Luzon Desk**

3 robbers nabbed

SAN PABLO CITY — Police arrested three members of a notorious robbery gang operating in this city in a manhunt operation last week. The suspects, Michael B. Miranda, 37, of Barangay Bambakan Phase 7; Fernando L. Magsaysay, 38, of Barangay San Montano; and Dennis S. Dionisio, 33, of Barangay Del Remedio were caught with some of the loot they stole from victim Federico D. Pardo of Colago Avenue, also of this city. The suspects, police said, also admitted responsibility for the robbery of the Benedict Day Activities Center here on December 2003. The suspects are now detained at the district jail. **Ronnie B. Perez, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau**

2 plays in UP Baguio

THE UNIVERSITY of the Philippines Baguio Community Theater Collective will stage the early to mounting two one-act plays directed by Martin Masaddo entitled "Ang Pambansang Sa mga Balanse na Gabgabi" and "Nang Matitiwa Kayong Pumapa" at the UP Baguio Auditorium this coming Sunday, June 1 year, according to a UP Baguio press release. The play dates are set for 10, 11, 12 and 15 with matinee at 3 p.m. and night at 7 p.m. This is one of the major productions of Rumbak Grang, a celebration of culture and the arts of the UP Baguio and the university's contribution to the Panagbenga Festival. Tickets are sold at P50 each. Tickets for group viewings will be sold at a discounted price. For details, please visit the Central Box on Colfax and Brookside, UP Baguio, or call at tel. no. 444-1565.

The winners of the 18th PLDT-DPC Telephone Directory Cover Visual Art National Competition!

Cheers to the youth who made a difference!

EDWARD ALLAN GARCIA 1st Prize Winner | SAMUEL BULAGA 2nd Prize Winner | JAYPEE SAMSON Grand Prize Winner | JOVEN SUANET 3rd Prize Winner | ABIGEL JOSEPH FUNAMO 4th Prize Winner

The masterpieces of these top five talented young individuals will grace the covers of the 2004-2005 PLDT-DPC telephone directories, after emerging as the five winners in this year's competition.

Admire their award-winning renditions of this year's theme: **"The Filipino Youth Making a Difference"** at the Ayala Museum, Makati Stock Exchange Building, Ayala Avenue, Makati City from February 4-29, 2004.

Don't miss this chance to celebrate with the most promising young artists today!

Grand Prize JAYPEE SAMSON
University of the Philippines-Diliman
"Hawaiang Hangarin. Kabuhan, Pag-Asa Pa Rin Ng Bayan!"
Oil on canvas, 29" x 29"

2nd SAMUEL BULAGA

3rd JOVEN SUANET

4th ABIGEL JOSEPH FUNAMO

5th EDWARD ALLAN GARCIA

1st Honorable Mention
ANDREW N. CHALDARES
Far Eastern University
"Pintoras Ng Idol Kong Di Kaya Pati"
Oil on canvas, 29" x 29"

2nd Honorable Mention
BRIAN LLOYD P. ALMARIO
Philippine Women's University
"Kabuhan Ng Ating Diwa, Tatay Ko Hinahanap-Hanap Ko"
Mixed Media, 29" x 29"

3rd Honorable Mention
VIVIENE I. BELEN
University of Santo Tomas
"Elementos Ng Pagbabago at Pagtatang Sa Mga Bagong Kabuhan"
Mixed Media, 27" x 27"

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Protesters to stage hunger strike vs coal-fired plant

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY—Environmentalists here were poised to stage a hunger strike as the commissioning of the Sentinel-backed 8x300 MW 2.6-megawatt coal-fired power plant in Villanueva, Misamis Oriental starts next week.

Rosanna Ellorin, spokesperson of Task Force Manolo, told the Inquirer that hunger strike is the most basic form of protest they could stage against the power plant, being built by Alsen Power Development Corp. (APDC) and Cotabato firm STEAG AEC.

Ellorin said his group does not mind if some of them die during the hunger strike.

"Anyway the construction of the coal-fired power plant is already an open graveyard for the residents here and to Misamis Oriental. We believe that risking our lives would be worth it if only to stop the madness of government officials who are out to kill us with the intensity of the pollutants of the coal," Ellorin said.

The Friends of the Earth in Japan (FOEJ) has earlier urged its government to cancel the loan that the Japan Bank for International Cooperation approved for the project.

FOEJ campaigner Hiroki Ihara cited the Extractive Industries Report (EIR) published in December 2003 to back the group's assertion that JBIC should not approve (a coal-related project).

The EIR is a review of the World Bank's involvement in oil, gas, and mining projects.

Ellorin said TFM has backed the decision of the seven members of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan of Misamis Oriental to withdraw their support for the project.

Lawyer Oscar Moral, one of the board members, withheld his withdrawal of support from an earlier resolution that endorsed the project.

However Misamis Oriental Acting Gov. Miguel de Jesus told the Inquirer that the project would go on because it has already been approved by the National Economic Development Authority, environment committee Climate Change Commission, PD Mindanao Bureau

CRIME SCENE
Curious onlookers mill at the corner where at least two suspects fired their hand guns at Buhari Gov. Ameerudin's service vehicle. At the background is the old provincial capitol, where the governor holds office.

P2.2-B road project in Maasin to start

By Jaro Arreola
PDI Visayas Bureau

MAASIN CITY—The landslide in Panaon Island in December last year that left over 100 people dead has brought a blessing to the long-neglected island.

The government, having become aware of the need to develop infrastructure in the island in the wake of the pre-Christmas tragedy, is set to open in two weeks the seven-year-old road widening project in Panaon and Pilar towns in Southern Leyte.

Southern Leyte Gov. Roseller Lerias told the Inquirer last Wednesday that Public Works and Highways Secretary Florante Soriquez was expected to sign last Friday a resolution confirming the winning bidders of the JBIC (Japan Bank for International Cooperation)-funded P2.2 billion road-widening project.

He said that after Soriquez' confirmation, the papers would be forwarded to JBIC office in Manila, which will in turn give a Notice to Proceed to the winning contractors.

"In two weeks time, the mobilization of equipment will start," said Lerias, quoting Highways Undersecretary Rodolfo Diaz-Sanchez, who the governor said inherited her of the 33rd Pro Loan Package update in a meeting in Manila on Monday.

The package also includes road-rehabilitation projects in Bohol and Surigao provinces.

Lerias said President Macapagal-Arroyo would most likely launch the project in Maasin during her presidential campaign swing in the province this March.

A consortium of Italian and Thailand contractors, Italthai, won the bidding for the 28-km Libas-San Ricardo road-concreting project, while a partnership of Cavite Steel Contractors (Cavitex) and Chino Road Projects will undertake the 16.8-km Bunga-Lapu-Lapu Abuyog, Leyte in the Pacific side of the province. The bidding was conducted last the year.

Three villages in Libas, San Ricardo and San Francisco, all on Panaon Island, were hit by landslides and flashfloods on Dec. 14 and 20 that left 154 persons dead. The bodies of many of the victims who were buried in mud have not been recovered to this day.

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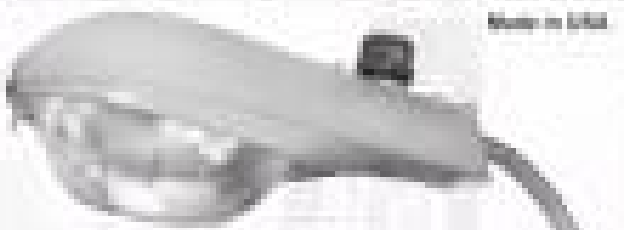
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Bishop blasts pols over 'jueteng' in Nueva Vizcaya

BAYOMBONG, Nueva Vizcaya—A Catholic bishop on Friday denounced "greedy" politicians in his province who he claimed were the "brains" of the worst resurgence of "jueteng" here.

"They were the ones who initiated this so that they would be able to get campaign funds, (with which) they would be able to buy votes or spend those funds during the campaign," Bishop Ramon Villena told the faithful.

He, however, declined to directly throw politicians he said he was "very disappointed" to hear the "explosive news" from Gov. Rodolfo Aglugub that jueteng operations in the province had resumed.

Villena said he had received persistent telephone calls from residents annoyed by jueteng's resurgence in various towns.

The timing of the resurgence of jueteng, Villena said, pointed to a logical conclusion that it was connected with the May 10 elections as part of "money politics."

"It is very lamentable that through jueteng, [some politicians] get money from the poor, then afterwards they give the money back to the poor as if it were their own money," he said.

He called on the people "not to vote for candidates who receive money from jueteng lords and easily give money to their some relatives."

The police may have also allowed the illegal numbers game to return, Villena said.

"They may have been pressured, or may even be afraid of the politicians. Or maybe, even the police allowed this thing to happen to get their own slice of the jueteng payola," he said.

Villena said former Supt. Felix Caddali, Nueva Vizcaya police director, earlier assured him that he would "do something" about the revived jueteng operations.

But the bishop expressed dismay that until Friday, he still received reports that jueteng continued to thrive "with practically no effort from the police."

Villena said Caddali had promised to step down if the police failed to control the resurgence of jueteng in the province.

"If (Caddali) really does not have the strength, the will and courage [to stop jueteng], then he should voluntarily leave as he promised," he said.

Aglugub said he has consulted with Villena and they agreed to give Caddali a chance to stop jueteng operations in the province.

"But the bishop said that if (Caddali) could not do anything to stop it, there we might ask for his relief as well," Aglugub said.

Caddali assumed as provincial police director in December 2003 following the relief of Senior Supt. Jesus Mendoza for the latter's supposed failure to curb the resurgence of jueteng in the province.

Bit Caddali said the police are doing their best to curb the "guerilla-type" jueteng operations here.

"The latest jueteng operations are relentless. I have instructed my officers to exert all effort to arrest those responsible for these operations," he said.

Other officials here blamed the presence of the illegal numbers game in nearby hotels and Subic, with lot collectors smoking in their collections and conducting drives in the provincial boundaries. *With Gaucen, PNI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Burials of 2 NPA victims turn into protest rallies

LEGAZPI CITY—The burial last Wednesday of the 15-year-old boy accidentally killed when New People's Army rebels ambushed a military convoy turned into a protest rally with at least 1000 families, including children nearly of NPA victims, joining the burial and condemning the NPA killings in Bicol.

Francis Drap, 15, of Barangay Allang, was buried in the city's public cemetery some 4km from his residence.

Drap died instantly when he was hit by a bullet as he was selling a bath at his house near the ambush scene.

His sister Blanber, 5, and brother Raymund, 8, were seriously wounded when at least 60 NPA members ambushed the military convoy of the 22nd Infantry Battalion based in Pio Duran, Albay last Sunday Col. Bienvenido Nieto, newly installed battalion commander.

Protesters raised placards with the words printed in red denouncing the communists.

Grace Drap, father of Francis, said his son's death is the best evidence that the NPA rebels are anti-people, as they attack military men even in populated areas.

The NPA's Samra Missentry Command in Albay claimed that it was not the rebels' bullet that killed the boy but that of the military.

But the latter strongly believed that it was the NPA who killed him and because the rebels were in an elevated position when the ambush happened.

In Lucena City, Muslim residents raged during the funeral Saturday of police official SPO2 Angelito Montecalvo who was pointed down by a communist hit squad a week ago.

Chief Insp. Eric Villanueva, 41st Provincial Police Mobile Group chief who attended the burial, said indignant and placard carrying multi-sectoral groups brought the body of Montecalvo to the Muslim cemetery.

"There's no truth to the New People's Army's accusation that officer Montecalvo was involved in illegal drug activities. As a matter of fact, he was the most active policeman in Muslim in our fight against illegal drugs," he told the hundreds over the phone.

"He died a poor person with no house of his own, living only with his in-laws. What he left to his family is only a rickety service bicycle that he used in patrolling his beat."

The statement left by the rebel hit team belonging to the NPA-Apolonio Mendoza Command after the shooting, said Montecalvo was killed due to his alleged persistent conduct that involved illegal drugs, illegal fishing and illegal logging, and related activities.

About 1,000 residents joined the long procession-funeral march. Some people carried placards denouncing the senseless NPA killings, according to reports of the Muslim News cable television. Bishop Antonio Ledesma, Lucena Archdiocese, and Mike Arroyo, PNI Southern Luzon Bureau

Military sweeps worry Iloilo villagers

By Ma. Dinah Lubinao and Nestor Burgos
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—Military sweeps against communist rebels since August has made terrorized villagers of Igbaras town, 40 km. south of here, worried of the safety of their sons kids.

Some young men are leaving their homes and families behind because they do not want to be suspected of siding with the rebels. Those who did not leave soon, pleaded their children constantly monitor their movements, and some have even made as guides during the soldiers' patrols.

Florida Echalar, a widow of Barangay Igtabugao, said the sent her two sons, 23 and 25 years old, to Manila to find work. She said she was worried of their safety because the military suspected them to be NPA rebels.

Igbaras town mayor Jovencio Gonzaga said the military sweeps were assisted soldiers of reinstituting human rights abuses and disrupting up the anti-communist hysteria. A farmers group, Mayanas nang mga Mangugpapanu sa Igbaras (AME, demanded of the pullout of soldiers to their villages so that they could continue farming and live their lives.

Lt. Raul Aipo, company commander of the 31st Reconnaissance Company based in Barangay Tubiao, denied the allegations.

Tiger Alcantara, 47, a soldier father to carry a backpack and a rifle. "My men do not need anyone to carry their things. They are strong because I give them exercises," he said.

Tiger said several barangays in Igbaras were engaged in "tribal militarized," and the soldiers were always on alert.

Lt. Col. Danilo Sumopia, 47th IB commander, has earlier said that the complaints against the soldiers were instigated by the NPA because they can no longer collect revolutionary taxes in the area.

He said he would not dignify the accusations with an answer because they were "shallow." "Why leave we leave or yo or killed any one?" he said.

With the Army's presence unleashing hysteria spread all over by farm. Priests with containers of Igbaras convoy Jimmy Mendoza, Isidro and AME's officer Ricardo Jurandla, were distributed and pasted at the Igbaras Municipal Alliance for Democracy, an anti-communist group, the posters try to link AME with the clandestine National Democratic Front and Communist Party of the Philippines.

The dialog ended with the provincial government asking the military to respect right of civilians and with the representatives of the Commission on Human Rights urging that they will look into the concerns raised by AME.

GMA orders probe of Mindoro killings

From page A1

administration's harassment of its perceived political enemies was a good argument against extending the term of Ms. Macapagal. The President is seeking a full six-year term.

Jesnen Bhuna has accused the military of being behind the death of Magsino, who was supportive of the left-leaning parties-list group.

Although a government official, Magsino, 34, had maintained a simple lifestyle. The car in which she died was owned by the municipal government and her parents's home is still an ordinary-looking house.

The vice mayor was born on Aug. 6, 1969 in Barangay Adelantar, Magsino, to Senators Magsino of Mabini, Batangas and Gorgelia Montenes, of Barangay Sta. Isabel, Magsino. She has a canine, Jocelyn, who has been working in Bulgar since 1988 and a brother, Joel.

Father's wish

Magsino dreamed of becoming an architect, but she pursued the law because it was the wish of her father, a former valte-mac authority resident in Tambobong.

The vice mayor's father had thought that having a lawyer in a poor family like his was important. The Magsinos were five brothers of land, but unfortunately.

Magsino, who was well-endowed her father's wish as she grew up on the farm. "She knew the work in the fields. She could plow and lift a carton of rice," her mother said.

Because she and her siblings needed college at the same time, she was asked to stop going to school. But with help from her grandparents, also farmers, Magsino finished an AB in Political Science course at the University of the East in Manila.

Working student

It was during this time that her leadership and human rights-advocacy were awakened. She was elected president of the Political Science society and served as secretary-general of the Legislative branch of the student government.

MAGSINO: It would be good to die in the service of the people.

In fulfill her father's dream, Magsino worked during the day at the Comelec Law Office in the City Manila, and studied law in the evening at the Manuel Luis Quezon University. In law school, she received the Justice Antonio P. Bautista Memorial Award, which was reserved for Outstanding Achievement and Performance in Remedial Law.

After passing the bar in 1994, she sought law in the Philippines while working as an associate lawyer in the Comelec Law Office.

"Because he was already old, her father asked her to return home so they could be together," related her brother.

Magsino first worked as legal officer at Ventas Realty in Calapan until the local elections were held in 1998. She also taught law at the Divine Word College and the Lyceum-Jaro College.

Full of promise

During a barangay fiesta, Magsino caught the attention of Mayor Bolbok Malipot, who was then serving his last term.

"Young, cashewnut, friendly, carefree and full of promise," Melipot said of Magsino. "I thought she would make an effective vice-candidate."

Melipot says policies and issues a political adviser to Magsino. "I saw myself in her with her idealism," the mayor said. It didn't take long for Magsino to be endorsed outside Naujan. She campaigned and started to other towns in a joint ticket.

Magsino won as councilor with a record highest number of votes. After that, she was elected vice mayor. Despite her losses to get the votes of the Iglesia ni Cristo, she still won by 2,033 votes.

In the course of her political and legal career, she continued her human rights advocacy, organizing a primary disaster response in local government. She was against mining.

Because of her advocacy, she received death threats, but she took them in stride. "It would be good to die in the service of the people," her mother quoted her as saying.

With reports from Juliet Labog-Javellana, Norman Bordadora and Michael Lim Ubac

A COLLECTION of Salazar's "looms" creations during a retrospective fashion exhibit held on Nov. 22 last year.

Joe Salazar's quiet life, times, fashion and faith

From page A1

he was that "God made all (hers happen)"—unless Salazar's own account that came at the last minute. He support of his longtime clients and, most important, his family.

That night, as he greeted friends and patrons at the ABS-CBN IL-7 Communication Center, Salazar looked like he had put on weight. He face had a pinkish glow and, in fact, he was strong enough to step up until the last guest left. We thought he had finally homecoming.

Ironic

However, he was never able to enjoy the rebirth to see that finally embraced him as far as General Luzon made the rounds, to thumb City, to admire and bask from his masterpieces.

A few weeks after that night, his health went downhill. He would no longer do the furious and gowns that would have supplied his gala collection last November at the Metropolitan Museum Town House and Exhibit. He had to muster enough strength to unveil the fashion show to him given him to the life event by the younger designers.

Though they know his health was waning, Bubot and many of Manila's high-profile women rushed to flock to Salazar's atelier-home in Makati to have gowns and evening wear made. The last two years had been the busiest for his atelier since the 1980s, when he did all of Imelda Marcos' gowns.

One afternoon last August, he looked around his living room/dining room which had been turned into a workshop filled with cutters and seamstresses, and grinned at us, saying: "Bring me back to the happiness! (Just when I got sick)."

There had been a resurgence of demand for his work, ironically at the time that he was diagnosed with throat cancer.

Small wonder. Terno elegance and glamour had returned in fashion, and the muted ball gowns, terno and beautifully crafted evening wear—all right down his fashion alley.

In the past three months, Salazar was in and out of the hospital for chemotherapy. His atelier continued production until early last month, when it started turning away clients. "Joe invoke sign, 'we called it'—ask if he could join a bridal fashion show in March for seven top designers, or at least send an old wedding gown. The answer had subtled hint of the ability to speak; his staff felt it was only appropriate he would pass up on that one rather than feed an old gown for parading on the runway.

Golden Age

By then, he was confined to the bedroom, and the atelier had a few remaining gowns to finish. On Saturday at 3:30 p.m., after 8, real watches were put on the last wedding gown—that of Michelle Tantoco. Salazar breathed his last, surrounded by his siblings and members.

He had seen his craft through adulthood.

Salazar belonged to the generation of Filipino fashion designers who breathed and lived their art, despite the odds. He and his peers—among them, Gang Umali, Inday Badiday, Rudy Cuyos, Inno Sotto and Auggie Cordero—came of age in the 1970s when daily luncheon fashion shows were the rage, engendering continuous competition on to the 1980s and 1990s.

Three decades might be considered the Ipun Ramos Valera period: golden era of Philippine fashion, because it was then that Filipino designers achieved significant trend-setting productivity in both haute couture and ready-to-wear.

Salazar started with casual wear, the most popular of which was the pantsuit worn sometime then's Aunor wore for a self-titled all. But when he exquisitely beaded blue chiffon gown worn for him the Valera thread in 1979, Salazar became a major player in local fashion.

Downswing

In the early 1980s, then First Lady Imelda Marcos tapped Salazar to do most of her wear—averaging six a month. Salazar lent such piece his design genius, his knowledge of construction, his penchant for painstaking detail and, most of all, his playful imagination. Marcos seemed to test the term's limits, and Salazar rose to the challenge. Together, gaiety and artful looks the rules to terno design, material and ornamentation. Salazar experimented with embroidery, beading and appliqué, from home hand to peacock feathers.

After the fall of the Marcoses in 1986, Salazar went into a downswing, if not depression. One of the things we remember during the 1986 Edsa Revolution were photo conversations with a tearful Salazar. One observed that characteristic had him weakly.

By the late career-wise, but never really disappeared from the scene. Stylish women would wear a Joe Salazar now and then at high-profile events; then gowns were invariably stunned and sacred media-fodder.

This past decade, Salazar prevailed anew. He made the international terno and other gowns of then First Lady Ms. Loisa "Lor" Ejercito, and the bridal gown of her daughter Jodee. Later, he also did the bridal gowns of Mayor Jejomar Binay's daughters in law, Angelu and Kabet. Salazar even had the celebrity clientele: Isabel, notably Lucy Torres and Charlene Gonzales.

Controversial one-through

While he didn't grab the limelight, he plodded on behind the scenes. He never felt it was beneath him to join group shows, or make clothes for special events when asked. He made that controversial new-through hoop terno for Miss Israel in the 1974 Miss Universe contest held here.

Aside from his great talent, Salazar had other distinct qualities that made him an outstanding Filipino. Despite his success, he was never loud or a limelight-grabber. He had delicious sense of propriety, and was an honest worker. He enriched all the circles in which he moved with his own values, at a time when Philippine society as a whole needed them most. (Salazar's cremated remains will be at the funeraria de Jose Antonio in Forbes Park, Makati, from this afternoon till Friday.)

Opposition should learn from primaries of US Democrats

From page A1

were their bellwether.

A contender needs at least 2,161 delegates to win the Democratic nomination in July in Boston. Kerry's sweep of a broad canvass of American states shows that the man from a liberal New England state not only has a viable chance to win the conservative South but the capacity as well to unite support across a wide spectrum of American voters, across race and economic and social interests, including the rural, urban, to agricultural and industrial and manufacturing divide.

The string of victories proves Kerry has the broad appeal to Democratic voters who are moving, a growing antagonism to the Bush administration. The next contest will be the big Midwest states of Wisconsin tomorrow, where Dean and Edwards are making their last stand.

This will be followed by a round of caucuses and primaries in Hawaii and Idaho for the rest of February and primaries in the big states, including California, Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island and Vermont, beginning on March 2. This series paves the obstacles that Democratic contenders have to hurdle to prove their viability and the breath of their constituency to order to beat the sitting president.

The resurrection of Kerry is a story of turning public opinion polls on their head or a republican by-election of poll surveys.

What is more most important for Filipinos at the moment is not the final outcome of the Democratic nomination process but how its dynamic works in selecting presidential candidates under democratic conditions, in a very open, democratic and competitive environment.

This process draws a stark contrast to the selection process for candidates in the Philippines, especially for the opposition, which began its process last November, ahead of the first local contests and New Hampshire primaries in January.

The Republican selection process is not being examined here. Bush does not face Republican primaries and caucuses. He is unchallenged in his reelection bid as the Republican Party whose convention will be a coronation for Bush.

Similarly, President Macapagal-Arroyo is unchallenged in the administration party.

Nomination

The secretary of the Democratic nomination process said that of the opposition alliance in the Philippines is important to make the point that the government can lead to highly competitive elections, in which voters are given a choice of the best that either the administration or opposition can offer.

In the case of the Philippines, the nomination process, or a combination of it, has led to a ripple-to-ruin and civil de-sac.

American political parties use primaries to select their presidential candidates, which must be a number of delegates proportionate to its population. The Democratic primaries and caucuses choose the 4,333 delegates who will select the party's presidential candidate at its national convention.

Primaries in the state level started in the the early 1900s. Prior to this, national political elders appointed the delegates to the convention, a system that invited corruption and manipulation by party bosses.

The primaries make the selection more open and democratic. Registered party members write in their votes, establishing the viability of a candidate through the primary test of a candidate to win across the nation. The process, with actual votes as the question, made possible Kerry's spectacular overturning of public opinion polls, which had favored Dean before the primaries started.

Kerry's campaign gained momentum not because of public opinion polls but in spite of them. He established his viability on the basis of his primary victories which validated and confirmed his status as a candidate who has the ability to challenge Bush.

After the primaries, polls highlighted precipitous that Kerry could win. This is a case of the polls following the actual event, not the events following the polls as they had done—and in the primaries. The voters did not allow professional pollsters to dictate into the outcome of the democratic process.

In the case of the Philippine opposition, its selection process clearly did not produce the best candidate to compete with the administration's candidates.

The administration's "hand-chosen" candidate by Sen. Edgardo Angara had no authentic feedback mechanism. Cholera and dictators were not made on the basis of evidence of electability but on the basis of poll surveys that were not validated by actual voting on the grass roots.

How Angara et al made their decision that Fernando Poe Jr. was the "front-runner" and was "winnable" is known only to themselves.

Key to victories

If pollster John Zogby and the key to Kerry's string of victories is the ability to win the undecided, Angara et al's decision to select Fernando Poe Jr. was the "front-runner" and was "winnable" is known only to themselves.

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Key to victories

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CAMANAVA FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT

Relocated settlers turn into landlords

By Edson Tandoc Jr.

THEY are being blamed for the delay of the Camanava flood control project, but some of the informal settlers who had been forced out of the project area have gone back to their shanties to continue earning a living.

Some of the settlers who went back to the Marpajo creek in Caloocan said that the relocation sites in Bulacan were too far from their workplaces, and job opportunities in the province were scarce.

But the lessons recently discovered that some of those who have moved to the relocation sites still get to maintain their shanties beside the creek—leasing the property to new settlers.

Alice, 20, and her husband moved into Marpajo creek several weeks after the area was cleared in 1998. She said she/she fate. At her home nearing the house of one of the relocated residents for P600 a month—the cheapest they have found in the city.

Alice, a mother of three, has witnessed at least three clearing operations in the creek from 1998 to 2003. In each clearing, she said that she and her neighbors would just stand by and let the marshing crew to leave and, before the end of the day, they would have rebuilt their shanties.

Although they are confident that no clearing operation would be done before the elections, Alice said that they are sure that the demolitions would resume right after the May polls.

Sukisan project manager Carlo Sanvi-la told the Inquirer that about 500 families have relocated to the project sites since the settlements were cleared in 1998. About 179 new families alone have settled in Marpajo creek.

It should have been the responsibility of the local government to keep the cleared areas free of illegal settlers, Sanvi-la said.

Project manager Leon Manting earlier told the Inquirer that while the project was still on schedule, the influx of settlers in the cleared areas has started to delay the project. After the project's ground-breaking in July last year, less than two percent of the project has been completed.

Barrado said that they have provided livelihood programs at the relocation sites.

She added that they have even formed a sub-committee to work with non-governmental organizations interested in helping provide livelihood projects for the relocated settlers.

The P5-billion flood control project is meant to solve the perennial flooding problem in the area.

Residents turn against lawmen in Quiapo melee

By Leila Salaverria

THOUSANDS yesterday gripped a community in Quiapo, Manila when members of the Philippine Public Safety Battalion (PPSB) clashed with illegal vendors who refused to leave the area.

One policeman was hurt, while a vendor said she was dragged by a policeman, during the melee that erupted during the police operation.

Initial reports from the MPD showed that several hundred men from Barrios Tayuman, Bambang and Tondo-Santa Cruz in Quiapo at around 1 p.m. on Monday set out to protest that clashes were being held in front of the malls there.

When the protesters arrived at the area, they found a fruit stall which they began dismantling. During an interview over radio station dzMM, Chief Insp. Jose Reuyan said he said his men found two suspected shabu at the stall.

Reuyan, who took part in the operation, said that when they started to take apart the stall, some Quiapo residents began throwing bottles and rocks at the lawmen. Members of the Special Weapons and Tactics unit had to be called in to defuse the tension.

PO1 Archilles Magat was hit in the eye by a bottle and had to be taken to the Chinese General Hospital, said SPO4 Max Leonardo.

But a vendor, identified only as "Sara," said during a radio interview that one of the arresters pulled a gun when and slapped her face. She also said that the MPD men were arrogant and did not even tell her why they had to tear down her stall. The vendor said she would be pressing charges.

Nobody was arrested in yesterday's operations.

Little angels that could

From page A 10

them do things."

Blessings

When Gamboa finished his Physical Therapy course in 1998, he never expected to work in a charity clinic for cerebral palsy children—"blessings," he calls them.

A year after he graduated, Gamboa got a job at the Philippine Cerebral Palsy Inc. in Makati City, and became one of the three staff members of the Physical Therapy department at the center.

"Almost all of my classmates have gone and worked abroad," Gamboa said. "Only eight to four and work here."

Passion for the job is the key ingredient that has made him stay and work at the center for almost five years, he said. Patience and love for children are next in line.

"You have to love what you do, it makes you like your job more ... and I do love my job," Gamboa stressed.

Studies show that about 10 to 20 percent of children who have cerebral palsy acquire the disorder after birth. Many brain cases are caused by an accident that occurs during pregnancy or birth, despite assorted palsy is the result of brain damage in the first few months or years of life.

Donations

"The PT and OT [occupational therapy] services used to be for free," said Manuel Jhave Barrera Jr., one of the therapists working at the center, "but because of the worsening economy and the dwindling number of donors, we had to charge the patients P50 per session since 2001."

"It is still a very low amount compared to other hospitals and PT or OT clearing operations," Barrera said, adding that services, where they charge you more than P1,000 per session."

Barrera said that although he was against the idea of charging the patients, he had to admit that there are fees to be paid to maintain the clinic's facilities and equipment.

Even though the clinic forces to charge

CHILDREN in or all wheelchairs get the same satisfaction working with computers, according to William Ballad, chair of the Philippine Cerebral Palsy Inc. MARIANNE BERMUDEZ

fees, Barrera said that they still provide services, where they charge you more than P1,000 per session."

Barrera said that although he was against the idea of charging the patients, he had to admit that there are fees to be paid to maintain the clinic's facilities and equipment.

Even though the clinic forces to charge fees, Barrera said the research services more than he had anticipated.

"I love kids, and I believe in the cause of the center," Barrera said. "I'm dedicated to my job. Otherwise, I wouldn't have lasted five years in the center.

"Even a child's smile makes us happy."

Do not forget us, lawmen tell bets

DON'T forget us in clock or in your doorway.

A group of Manila policemen has called on all candidates, particularly those running for local post, to stop making sweeping statements about corruption in the police force.

According to SPO1 Bernardo Emmanuel, president of the Manila's Finest Brotherhood Association, Inc. (MFBAI), their group is inviting candidates on the campaign trail so that they would be able to learn firsthand the situation of policemen in the grassroots level.

"Some politicians keep saying that policemen are corrupt, and since they are elected, they would get rid of corruption," Emmanuel said. "But such statements hurt us because the public (is led to believe) that all policemen are underpaid and corrupt."

Instead of hunting the police force, the politicians should try to understand what ails the 'peasants,' he said.

"I hope politicians can learn to love us," Emmanuel said. "We're not the only problem in society. We also play an important part."

Hoping the police force would also give politicians a chance to air their platforms which, in turn, would allow policemen to evaluate the candidates' suitability for a post, Emmanuel said.

"We want to make the proper choice," he said. Leila Salaverria

2 nabbed while answering nature's call

DAGSU Aslan and Celestino Hernan on Saturday were said to be answering nature's call in Digos, Davao City when patrolling barangay watchmen accosted them.

The watchmen got suspicious when they saw that the two men had an electric fan with them at 2:30 a.m.

The watchmen then frisked Aslan, 26, and Hernan, 24, and found a packet of suspected shabu, police said.

When the suspects were handed to the station, police learned that she has an extensive narcotics history solved in Bagong Silang, 3933 Pedro Pasinosis said in his report.

In Barrio Quezon City, Christopher Alipio was stabbed to death because of a damaged cellular phone.

Witnesses told police that they heard Alipio, 27, of North Gateway agreeing with Bali Santos, 17, at around 9:30 p.m. Saturday.

Alipio's neighbors said Santos had accused the victim of selling him a defective mobile phone.

They said Santos stabbed Alipio in the throat, as the suspect's companion held the victim's arms. Santos and his companion are now at large, police said. Edson Tandoc Jr.

The GSIS Scholarship Program

The Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) is now accepting applications from qualified incoming college students for the GSIS College Scholarship Program for SY 2004-2005.

To qualify under the program, applicants must be legitimate children of active GSIS members and must have a general academic average of 85% or its equivalent.

The following documents, together with the accomplished GSIS Scholarship Program form, should be submitted to the GSIS Main Office or to the nearest GSIS Branch or District Offices:

- 2 pcs. of passport size picture with signature at the back
- Certified copy of Birth Certificate
- Certified copy of 4th yr. (2nd Grading) High School Report Card
- Certified copy of their Parent's GSIS policy contract and
- Parent's Certificate of Employment

Qualifiers shall take the GSIS Competitive Examination to be administered by the Center for Educational Measurement.

Scholars can choose from among one of the following 4 or 5-yr. GSIS Priority Courses: Accountancy, Actuarial Science, Business Administration, Computer Science and related IT courses, Economics, Engineering major in Computer, Civil, Electrical & Electronics, Electronics & Communications, Industrial, Management and Mechanical only, Finance, Management, Marketing, Mass Communications, Mathematics and Statistics.

For more details, please visit the GSIS Main Office or your nearest GSIS Branch/District Office or contact Erma, Linda, Melanie and/or Marisa at the GSIS-HRDD Scholarship Unit at Tel. Nos. 925-6570 or 051-1651 local 4062/4060.

Application deadline: 2 April 2004.

GOVERNMENT SERVICE INSURANCE SYSTEM
"The GSIS is strong. Kasa siempre."

BLESSED are we that these children are, says one of the therapists tending to the kids. RICKY CHAVEZ

KIDS WITH CP

Little angels that could

By Joyce Abaño

RIELLA Mae, 8, warmed the hearts of her physical therapists when she took her very first steps a few weeks ago.

Riella Mae has cerebral palsy spastic diplegia, and she has been getting therapy at the Philippine Cerebral Palsy clinic regularly since she turned five.

Cerebral palsy is a permanent condition that affects thousands of babies each year. It is caused by injury to parts of the brain that control the ability to move muscles.

It was the goal of physical therapists to make Riella Mae walk, or at least to balance herself. For the therapists, the girl's progress brought a sense of fulfillment.

First step, first word

"Have you ever heard a family member talk about a child's first step, or the first word a child spoke?" asked Lawrence Gamboa, a physical therapist at the Philippine Cerebral Palsy clinic. "Out here at the clinic, we talk about a patient's first time to handle a spoon, or an 8-year-old girl's first steps ... any improvement makes us happy."

Riella Mae's case is one of the easier ones. Several children at the clinic have cerebral palsy spastic quadriplegia. These kids cannot move all their limbs, and most have to move around in wheelchairs—with the help of someone else.

A world of their own

Raymond has spastic quadriplegia, and he has to lie down on mats most of the time.

But Raymond has been receiving therapy at the clinic for quite some time now. Now, he can move around a room on a cart, which he propels using his elbows.

It was what the therapists were aiming for—to give Raymond a semblance of mobility.

Then there is the case of an autistic girl who has cerebral palsy spastic diplegia.

Gamboa said the case of the little girl is one of the more difficult ones.

"Autistic children have their own world," Gamboa said. "And it is sometimes difficult to reach them, or talk to them, or make

LITTLE/ A23

BUSINESS

Editor Raul O. Morales
Assistant Editor Corrie S. Mariano

50 YEARS
EIKI
BRAIN

Gov't debt burden swells to P3.36T

CURRENCIES

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

56.10 ▲

As of Fri, Feb. 13, 2004

56.39 ▼

As of Sat, Feb. 14, 2004

JANUARY FEBRUARY

GOLD: $413.30-413.80

per ounce Hong Kong Feb. 13 2004

February 14, 2004 Country	Unit	Cash Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.01782	1.00000	56.10000
Japan	Yen	1.90000	106.66000	5,985.73000
United Kingdom	Pound	0.01222	0.68600	38.49246
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.13922	0.78131	43.83591
Switzerland	Franc	0.02402	1.34821	75.64778
Canada	Dollar	0.02272	1.27500	71.53275
Singapore	Dollar	0.03031	1.70100	95.45391
Australia	Dollar	0.02318	1.30100	73.00098
Taiwan	Dollar	0.57000	31.99200	1,795.51200
Germany	Euro	0.01462	0.82038	46.04318
Saudi Arabia	Riyal	0.06681	3.75000	210.48750
Greece	Drahma	4.98000	279.53000	15,685.83000
Indonesia	Rupiah	167.00000	9372.00000	525,829.20000
Thailand	Baht	0.69000	38.73000	2,173.05300
UAE	Dirham	0.06543	3.67275	206.08655
Iran	Rial	180.00000	10104.00000	567,014.40000
Qatar	Riyal	0.06491	3.64300	204.43230
Kuwait	Dinar	0.00547	0.30715	17,236.66500
Brazil	Real	0.05741	3.22251	180,849.11910
Denmark	Krone	0.11403	6.40000	359.23200
India	Rupee	0.77400	43.44000	2,437.88400
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.06767	3.79900	213.20139
Mexico	New Peso	0.27319	15.33538	860.71818
New Zealand	Dollar	0.04500	2.52600	141.78060
Norway	Kroner	0.13700	7.69000	431.70900
Pakistan	Rupee	1.04679	58.76000	3,298.23600
South Africa	Rand	0.11700	6.57000	368.82700
Kenya	Shilling	1.38000	77.50000	4,350.75000
Sweden	Krona	0.13922	7.81500	438.75015
Syria	Pound	0.91000	51.09000	2,868.09900
Turkey	New Lira	0.02600	1.46000	81.96600
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.00045	0.02500	1.40350

STOCK MARKET

Earnings reports seen lifting stocks

LOCAL stocks are seen to continue as a consolidation trend this week as investors adopt a wait-and-see attitude to trading, in light of some corporate earnings reports due for disclosure in the coming days.

Last week, the main share Philippine Stock Exchange composite index inched up 1.49 points, or 0.10 percent, to close at 1,440.27.

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX

JANUARY FEBRUARY

See more market report on Page B2

Companies expected to post favorable financial numbers within the week encouraged to push the fundamentals up despite the decision of the California Public Employees Retirement Fund (CalPERS) to keep the country out of its investment list.

Blue-chip issues Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. and Jollibee Foods Corp. are scheduled to announce their 2003 financial results within the week. Both firms are expected to report better-than-2002 results.

"Investors will still look for fundamentals to entice them to enter the market. Consolidation will likely be at the 1,400-1,500 psychic level. Focus will be on PLDT and JFC, which are expected to affect the movement of the market and should eventually do [as] counterbalancer," Ford Bonilla Holdings Inc. managing director Isaac del Castillo said.

Also, the start of the campaigning period as well as the continuing uncertainty brought by the coming May polls are not expected to weigh the market down this week as investors' focus switches to the market-moving earnings reports of PLDT and Jollibee.

According to a Manila-based Philshares Inc. the market would continue to experience some back-and-forth movements as the earnings season streaks down and the attention season starts to rage.

"Stocks are expected to continue on with its consolidation (this) week... The market may remain in this holding pattern for the rest of the month," it said.

As the investing community has not yet heard all of the presidential candidates' economic platforms, Del Castillo added that the effect of the campaigns would mostly be felt in the coming days.

On CalPERS' decision to exclude the Philippines from the list of acceptable investment sites, he said this would be a "temporary" to market activity, but its reinstatement would not be felt until the United States' biggest pension fund makes its decision final.

The government is currently seeking representatives with CalPERS to clarify some issues thrown against it, leading to its exclusion from the pension fund's investment list.

Del Castillo said investors' focus would be more on the fundamentals of certain firms, particularly those in the telecommunications sector, rather than on issues like the upcoming elections and the CalPERS decision.

SPI Securities Corp. also said in its web-based report that with generally positive results posted last year, investors' outlook for 2004 also remained rosy.

"We still see market corrections as an opportunity to accumulate. The market is likely to consolidate within the 1400 to 1500 range. Investors will take their cue from the 2003 earnings release within the next two weeks," it said.

Abigail L. Ao

Investment Rates

February 13, 2004 Maturity	Bank Deposit Interest Rate	Treasury Bill Rate
1 Month	0.7001	0.7001
2 Months	0.8571	1.2714
3 Months	1.0844	1.2714
1 Year	0.9344	0.9511
2 Years	0.7143	0.7143
3 Years	12.5000	12.5000
4 Years	13.0000	13.0000
5 Years	13.2500	13.2500
6 Years	13.3750	13.3750
7 Years	13.5000	13.5000
8 Years	13.7500	13.7500
9 Years	13.8750	13.8750
10 Years	14.0000	14.0000

Source: Philippine Dealing System

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE NATIONAL government's outstanding debt swelled by P648 billion or 19 percent to P3.36 trillion as of end-2003 from P2.82 trillion the previous year.

Data from the Bureau of Treasury showed that the level of the government's foreign debt accelerated more aggressively than its local borrowings.

Dollar borrowings in 2003 reached P1.36 trillion ($$24.77 billion), up by P407 billion or 22 percent from P1.34 trillion a year ago while domestic debt rose by P233 billion or 13.6 percent to P1.77 trillion from P1.47 trillion in end-2002.

Comparing the December debt stock to the previous month's, however, the total borrowings eased by 0.9 billion or 0.11 percent from P3.36 trillion in November.

Domestic debt in December was lower by P2.7 billion or 0.98 percent from P1.72 trillion the previous month although foreign borrowings mildly increased from P1.64 trillion ($29.862 billion). The average exchange rate used in computing foreign debt increased to P56.30/$1 in December from P56.79 in November but was down off from P57.68 in end-2003.

Last year's national government debt stock already exceeded the 2004 programmed level of P3.26 trillion. As of July, the government had already surpassed its debt stock target of P3.086 trillion for 2003.

Obligations of the government accounted for more than half of the Philippines' total debt stock of P5.39 trillion as of September 2003.

The national government's debt stock, however, excluded P766.1 billion in contingent liabilities or obligations that could become actual if the guaranteed agencies fail to pay their dues.

The level of contingent debt had increased substantially in 2003, indicating a burgeoning amount of sovereign guarantees that the government had given to state agencies as well as the private sector.

Bridging the P3.36-trillion level of debt to population, each of the 82 million Filipinos accounts for a burden of about P40,514 in individual gross potential obligations.

The government estimated that the country's outstanding debt would likely swell to about P3 trillion over the next five years before it would be reduced to a more manageable level.

The only consolation was that 89 percent of the country's foreign debt were to mature in more than five years and only 11 percent would fall due in a year.

The country's rising public debt was one of the reasons why rating agencies have downgraded their credit ratings on Philippine debt.

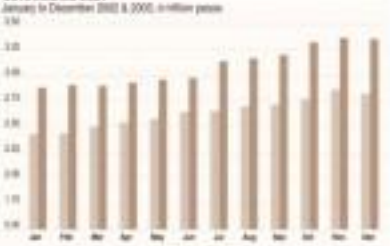
This year, the government would have to settle P542.3 billion in debts, up P116.5 billion or 27.4 percent more compared to P425.7 billion in debt servicing last year.

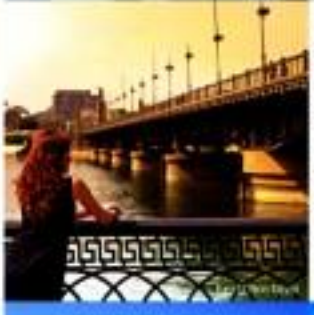
Interest payments of P257.5 billion this year would be P48.8 billion or 17.1 percent more than the P208.7 billion in 2003 while principal payments are up by 46.6 percent or P75.7 billion to P237.7 billion from P148.60 billion last year.

Debt service, as a ratio of gross domestic product, would increase to 11.6 percent this year from 9.9 percent a year ago and 9.1 percent in 2002.

OUTSTANDING DEBT

January to December 2002 & 2003, in billion pesos





All 5 of these destinations are in the Middle East.

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Take to the slopes in Lebanon.
Dine Mediterranean style in Syria.
Wander the wide boulevards of Cairo.
The next time you visit the Middle East, try something unexpected.
Start with how you fly.

Keep discovering.

Emirates

Terms and conditions apply. For more information, please call your travel agent or Emirates at (632) 811-1919 or fax (632) 811-1999. Emirates is licensed by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

RP sets last-minute attempt to convince CalPERS

By Cielito S. Bolino

A TWO-MEMBER delegation will mount a last-ditch effort to convince the California Employees' Retirement System or CalPERS to keep the Philippines on the list of permissible investment sites of the United States' biggest pension fund.

The Philippines scored 3.87 in the 2004 report to CalPERS submitted by Wilshire Consulting last week. While an improvement from 3.46 last year, the country's grade was still below the threshold of 3 set by the pension fund for the 25 countries eligible for investments.

Since 2002, the Philippines has failed to make it to CalPERS' grade but government officials managed to convince the pension fund to retain the country on the list. Last year, CalPERS gave the Philippines a one-year reprieve to work out its differences with Wilshire on the scoring system.

The country's distance of being retained on the list would depend on CalPERS' decision to either bring down the hurdle rate to 3.5 or to extend the reprieve period for the Philippines, Philippine officials said it would score higher if Wilshire would consider recent developments and other third-party sources.

Alexandria Furuta, a third-party source of Wilshire, had recently revised the Philippines' score in terms of compliance with international standards. From a grade of 76.25, the country's score improved to 90.77 and its ranking moved to 39 from 59 out of 85 countries evaluated by Alexandria Forum, based on a 100- to 0-point.

Philippine Ambassador to Washington Alberto del Rosario and Finance Assistant Secretary Jovencio Abad will meet with CalPERS officials this week to present improvements in the country's legislative reform agenda and other developments that address concerns of Wilshire such as the issue of investor monitoring and the country's non-payment of right-sized labor.

The CalPERS board will meet on Feb. 17 to decide where it would place more than $160 billion in assets it manages. Of the total, about $2 billion are in emerging markets.

While the inflation and UK pension fund has placed only about $50 million in local stocks, the pension fund's decision signals other funds to do the same.

Finance Secretary Jesus Arteneta had told the CalPERS on Feb. 11 to give an update on recent reforms that should increase the Philippines' score to 3 from 1 in the area of investors rest. Arteneta pointed out that Congress had ratified the rationalization of the documentary stamp tax.

"The implication of this development is that the country's share of the pension FMOU pie (value will be doubled), thus enabling a many days waive of 1 instead of 1," according to Arteneta.

But half CalPERS that Congress had also ratified the Securitization Act that would eliminate foreign costs. Arteneta also noted the necessary to promptness. There are no capital gains tax on shares traded on the Philippine Stock Exchange, which should "increase the capital gains score for the Philippines [...] from the current 2."

Arteneta also cited other pieces of legislation that were either passed or ratified such as the Rationalization of Compensation of the Judiciary, the Special Medical Act, the Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act, the Exemption of Banks and Other Financial Institutions from VAT, and the Tax Treatment of Offshore Banking Units and Foreign Currency Deposit Units.

On money laundering, Arteneta told CalPERS that continued efforts were being made to remove the country from the Financial Action Task Force's watchlist.

Last month, the anti-Money Laundering Council submitted to the Asia-Pacific Review Group of the FATF the implementation plans of the Philippines Anti-Money Laundering Act. Arteneta said the memo effort "represents stage one of FATF's de-listing process."

Wilshire bases its scoring on third-party sources. Half of the score is based on market factors such as transparency, regulation and investor protection while the other half considers country factors like political stability, judiciary, labor and civil liberties.

Alexandria Furuta recognized improvements in the country's adherence to global standards in terms of accounting and auditing, corporate governance, effective banking supervision, effective securities regulation and financial transparency.

T-bill rates seen to rise, peso to ease

SUSTAINED volatility in the peso would prompt banks to bid higher in today's auction of P11.1 billion-worth of treasury bills.

Traders said the government's run of short-term borrowing could go up by about 20 basis points today while the peso would test the 56.20-$/1 level seen within the week unless the government would move aggressively to cap the continued increase in rates and the weakness of the local currency.

"The fixed-income market will take its cue from the spot currency market. If the peso moves down, it will mean that banks will demand a higher return on their money," a trader said.

The peso closed at 56.10 vs a dollar last Friday with a total of $193.3-million traded. The local currency dropped back in the 56.02 level a week after the central bank raised the reverse repurchase rate on deposits and other liabilities by 1.5 percentage points to 7.5 percent. The increase in reserves should mop up P60 billion from the system.

"The peso could weaken to 56.26 by a dollar as political uncertainties continues to exert upward the dollar supply problem in the market," a treasury dealer said.

When the peso is volatile, banks usually seek a higher return when lending to the government instead of using the money to buy dollars where they would earn more.

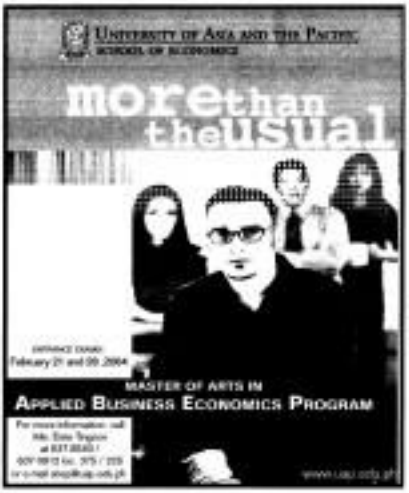
Last Friday, the secondary market saw already trading at 6.8 percent for the 91-day treasuries while the 182-day and 364-day treasuries were fetching bids of 6.9 and 9 percent.

The benchmark 91-day treasury bill rate, used by banks in pricing their loans, stood at 6.216 percent during the last auction. The 182-day bill was at 6.346 percent and the 364-day one at 6.384 percent.

The auction committee led by the Bureau of Treasury could reject unreasonable bids considering that the government had procured P120 billion in new funds last Friday.

On the peso, the central bank had warned that it would take overnight repo or banks' reserve requirement ratio taken if the weakness of the local currency would persist.

But last week's inaction of the Monetary Board coupled with lingering political uncertainties brought the peso back to the 56-61 level last Friday. Bernice L. Bolino



Mazda vs Honda

COMEBACKING: Mazda is apparently positioning itself against Honda.

You won't get this outright admission from Ford-Mazda group president Henry Co but per Mazda spokesperson Tonette Lee, Mazda's got to be feverishly outpriced by patriotic company Ford where it also relaunched its vehicles in the country after years of absence.

From before tomorrow's launch, Mazda had already secured deposits from eager customers for 15 Mazdas' units as well as for 50 Tribute sport-utility vehicles, which, with its "more appropriate ambient engineering" characteristics, will hopefully differentiate it from Ford Escape, with whom it shares a common platform.

Like Honda, Mazda apparently is veering away from the fleet-and-taxi market by choosing to locate its first dealer at the Quezon Avenue multi-level site.

The franchisee for the first Mazda dealership, at the corner of Quezon and Scania avenues, had been awarded to Mike Cheng, who also holds the Ford Balintawak franchise.

During Mazda's absence, the Ford Balintawak shop has also been supplying 323, 626, Miata and other Mazda parts.

Although not telling one a history of the Mitsu to spare car which has built a local cult following, Co reckoned only to the 80.6 and Mazda2 during his press conference last week as the two models that Honda hopes to bring in to the country toward the latter part of the year.

Co even gushed about the Mazda2, describing his excitement the first time he laid his eyes on it in Tokyo as "like getting his first car." He did not disclose what his first car had been, but the mini-luxurious grapevine said it was neither a Ford nor a Mazda.

COCKTALES

Victor C. Aganon

Banking buzz

✦ UBMS '64 party is using the state-owned Land Bank to facilitate fund transfers to its provincial chapters. It's even established a website, www.ubmsts.org, for this and other logistical purposes.

✦ The heirs of Senator President Gil Puyat, specifically GE Puyat Jr. and Amaia Puyat-Concepcion, are fighting an attempt of the GSIS Family Bank (the former Cotabato Bank) to foreclose on the late senator's controlling shareholdings in Manila Bank.

✦ The Singaporean efficiency is rubbing off on Citytrust, with the Filipino-Singaporean-owned bank last month scoring a PS-73 of Reuters status for Bancnet ATM system, topping established giants like Metrobank, Philippine National Bank, Bank of the Philippine Islands and United Overseas Bank.

US flak for FPJ

US EMBASSY PR scrambler Jose Manuel "Chito" Stanislaw has finally submitted to the Manila Golf Club colleagues that he has been helping the candidacy of actor Fernando Poe Jr.

Remember was accompanied by a US embassy cultural attaché during the Wednesday festivities at the Manila Golf where he made the admission, said former Manila Golf president and fellow Marcos disciple Teddy Casiño.

Casiño, who is fighting the government sequestration of his minority shareholdings in his former CDCP/PHILCOMSAT complex, admitted he was also rooting for FPJ like Remulden and Cuenca's Subic, the former Senator Ernesto Maceda.

FPJ was the front-page cover of a PR-driven magazine controlled by Remulden in December, shortly before FPJ announced that he was finally running for the presidency.

In addition to "helping" the US embassy Remulden's US lobbying firm Rhoads Maguire also obtained a $864,000 contract from the Philippine Department of National Defense to counsel the Philippine defense and military officials in their talks with Washington and Pentagon counterparts.

Heard through the grapevine

A TAGALOG and PINOY, media to the uni-bop US of popular tunes that surfaced during the impeachment hearings. Join the works, with production unit being undertaken by a prominent Makati-based family. (Email: mabini_philippines.com@yahoo.com)

(mabini_pil@hotmail.com)

$5,000 AND UP

BSP seeks waiver on dollar deposits

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas has ordered banks to renounce a section of the deposit secrecy law with clients who would park for more than 5 days the dollars worth $5,000 or more that they bought from the banking system.

As part of ongoing efforts to plug loopholes in its foreign exchange regulations, the BSP has also required banks to present a "notarized copy" of import documents submitted by importers buying dollars to ensure that these papers were not being used to back up other dollar purchases.

While improving its regulations, the BSP also continued to crack down on speculators. Sources said that BSP examiners recently reached dozen 3 foreign banks suspected of violating the central bank's currency regulations.

The covered banks had supposedly no membership of dollar transactions after the peso fell to a record low of 56.30 to $1 on Feb. 3. Last Friday the local currency closed at 56.10 to a dollar.

Although BSP officials kept on saying they have not seen any evidence of speculation, BSP Deputy Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. said 3 foreign banks suspected of hiding irregular dollar transactions in off-book accounts.

Sources said the 3 foreign banks refused to open their off-book accounts when BSP examiners went to investigate.

"The BSP examiners feel that these banks have been keeping their dollars purchased from the spot market in their off-book accounts. To some extent, this is where their offshore transactions are lodged," a source explained.

One foreign bank was caught with an off-book item bigger than its total resources, said a source.

BSP Deputy Governor Alberto Reyes said that banks were not allowed to accept for deposit the dollars worth at least $5,000 they had sold to clients although the funds could be parked for 5 days to facilitate transfers or payments.

This supports the BSP regulation allowing banks to sell dollars worth $5,000 and above only to clients with legitimate requirements. Banks' foreign currency deposit units or FCDUs could be a potential outlet of currency speculators.

"We will allow them to park for more than 5 days on condition that there is a waiver from the buyer [of the dollars]. We just want to have a trail and avoid indefinite parking as well as repetition of payment," Reyes said.

The BSP had also ordered banks to present a "notarized" copy of the original documents on the bill of lading or invoice transactions used by importers to support their dollar purchases. Importers are the biggest buyers of dollars in the market.

Reyes said the waiver requirement was designed to avoid "duplication in the use of invoices and bills of lading" used to back up dollar purchases.

"We need some verification to the effect that the original documents were presented to the banks for payment," he said. The notarized copy must be authenticated by a "responsible and authorized official of the bank," such as the head of the treasury department or the bank's foreign exchange head.

The BSP would allow clients to park their dollars with the bank for no more than 5 days provided that a waiver is signed to allow monetary authorities to check if the money was eventually withdrawn or used to settle accommodating obligations.

Reyes said the requirements for a waiver was contained in the circular letter the BSP recently issued to remind banks that $5,000 and more bought from the banking system should not stay indefinitely in FCDU accounts.

The waiver is important because under the law, the BSP is prohibited from examining FCDU accounts as these are held in absolute secrecy.

Reyes said without a waiver, banks must not allow the funds to be kept in their vaults even for a short-term deposit. He noted, however, that FCDU deposits were stable at about $11.5 billion the previous week.

An increasing level of dollar deposits signals a stable capital flow but volatile movement. In FCDUs could also indicate some currency speculation.

P880M IN BACK TAXES

SMC disputes BIR ruling

By Abigail L. Ho

FOOD and beverage conglomerate San Miguel Corp. has asked final says the Bureau of Internal Revenue's decision to charge it an additional P880 million in back taxes, insisting that San Miguel Light was an entirely different brand and not just a variant of an existing product.

"For the BIR to tax San Miguel Light as a variant would be a reversal of the product's registration and tax classification through the years as a new brand and an subject to a tax rate of P9.35 (later P18.22) per liter, which is a matter of record and which the BIR has confirmed both in writing and by approving tax payments on removals of San Miguel Light on the basis that it is a new brand," the company said in a letter to the BIR.

The BIR earlier ruled that San Miguel should remit P1.2 billion worth of taxes for San Mig Light, retroactive since the product's launch in 1999, as this was a variant of the popular San Miguel Pale Pilsen brand.

But the tax collection agency revised its computation to P880 million after taking the San Miguel Pale Pilsen in Cebu as a basis for taxation. The BIR used the All-Malt brand, which had already been pulled out of the market, as the basis for its earlier computation.

Whatever tax computations the BIR had made, however, would not be honored by San Miguel as it exercised to stand firm in its position that San Mig Light was not a variant but an entirely separate brand.

Under the Tax Code, a variant is defined as a brand to which a modifier is added as a prefix or a suffix to an already existing brand in the market. The should also bear a logo or design that is the same as the root brand.

San Mig Light, argued San Miguel, did not at all share the same name, logo and design with Pale Pilsen or any other existing San Miguel brands, for that matter.

"San Mig Light has a distinctive and different inscription and name shape, color scheme, size, packaging and general appearance," the letter stated.

Also, the conglomerate said the BIR's ruling to tax the beer brand retroactively would "go against the spirit of the prohibition against retroactivity of any regulation, classification or removal of a ruling or circular promulgated by the BIR commissioner if the same will be prejudicial to the taxpayer."

Election spending

NOTWITHSTANDING all the uncertainty before us, everyone expects our economy to perk up this year, especially in the first half of it, even if only because of one single event, which is the May 10 national elections. What makes elections so good for the economy? Or is it really?

As everyone knows, a lot of money goes around the economy in the months leading up to the election itself.

This is money coming out of the bank accounts here and abroad whether hidden or subsidies, out of government outlays, out from underneath mattresses and hidden treasure chests, and yes, even from illegal money printing machines (expect to see more of those fake currency notes going around in the next several weeks!).

This is money that buys campaign posters and streamers, radio and TV spots, newspaper ads, transport services for candidates and their entourage, T-shirts and caps emblazoned with candidates' names, show business personalities' talent fees, hotel and other lodging accommodations, food and meals consumed and guns away during the campaign... I'm sure you can add quite a few more to the list.

And up until the election ban takes effect (although that hasn't necessarily stopped people), it of course includes money spent for pushed infrastructure projects—provided, naturally, by those promising politicians with all the names of the generous politicians who have "gifted" us with those oh-so-vital facilities that they had always owed us in the first place.

One percentage point

How much additional spending can we reasonably expect to come about because of the elections? Let's begin with the campaign itself. No one can really estimate this with any degree of precision, but we can at least try to get a ballpark estimate. A good starting point would be the authorized campaign expenditures provided by law.

The law says that the presidential and vice-presidential candidates are allowed to spend as much P3.0 per voter; the other candidates P1.

With 43 million voters reportedly registered, this means P400 million per candidate. Assuming only four big-spending candidates, this would amount to P1.6-billion. It is probably conservative to say more than actual expenditures will be twice that amount—never mind that it's against the law—so I'd say about P3 billion will be spent by the presidential and vice presidential candidates alone.

Without going into the details of my back-of-envelope calculations for the rest of the roughly 50,000 candidates running at all levels, I conservatively estimate another P1.0 billion, giving a rough total of about P25 billion in overall campaign spending.

This is worth about one percentage point of GDP (which was the figure given by Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri during the budget hearings.) Add to this another several billion pesos in realized infrastructure spending at all levels (i.e. those that would not have normally been undertaken if not for the upcoming elections).

This would lead us to expect the GDP growth rates for the first two quarters to be about one percentage point higher than what it would normally be.

The past record

The question is, what would it have "normally" been? Have the past few quarters' growth in the industrial sector, which includes manufacturing as its dominant part, been normally born on a shoestring trend.

From a robust 9.3 percent growth in the first quarter of 2003, it had slowed down to 3.2 percent by the last quarter. For manufacturing, the numbers were 3.3 percent for the first quarter, down to 3.1 percent in the last. Our Ateneo Macroeconomic Forecasting Model (AMFM) gives us a "steady-state" growth rate of this class of 2.7 percent, which can roughly be interpreted as the growth rate we would attain if we do nothing at all, i.e. a business-as-usual scenario.

All told, I would expect to see a GDP growth rate of around 4 percent in the first two quarters, or possibly more depending on how much I am underestimating actual campaign spending above.

Reviewing the data for the last two election years 1998 and 2001, one finds that election spending first was more of a series than a stimulant to the economy.

Growth rates in domestic output in the first two quarters of 1998 were 1.1 and 1.0 percent respectively, and for 2001 were 2.9 and 1 percent respectively.

In 1998, just even the election spending could offset the dampening effect of the recent financial crisis. In 2001, election spending probably averted what could have been much worse economic performance given the world slowdown and the unprecedented crisis we had just emerged from.

The downside

It is not all good that election spending brings, especially at this time. Such higher spending, especially by government, normally leads to a stronger upward pressure on prices, particularly if it leads the government to a larger budget deficit.

What makes the situation worse at this time is that even ignoring the elections, price increases have already been upsetting the five other reasons, not the least of which is the rapid peso depreciation.

Added to higher import tariffs due to recent policy reversals, rising petroleum prices and transport costs, reduced smuggling (which does have the disadvantage of removing supplies of cheap goods—not that I am condoning it!), rising interest rates, and likely demands for higher wage rates.

With all of that, I would expect inflation rate in 2004 to go up by more than just one percentage point.

Comments welcome at abho@ateneo.edu

NO FREE LUNCH

Carlito F. Galvez

AIR TALKS WITH CHINA

RP seeking stopover rights

By Abigail L. Ho

PHILIPPINE negotiators may allow Chinese carriers to fly to another country from the Philippines in exchange for stopover rights.

Civil Aeronautics Board executive director Teresa Bañaloc said Philippine carriers enjoyed rights to service key cities of Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, including the right to carry passengers picked up during stopovers in any one of these places to another point in China.

"In return, the Philippines would give fifth freedom rights to China so that its carriers could fly to South Korea, Japan and Europe from the Philippines," he said.

The Philippine and China are scheduled to discuss these possible arrangements during negotiations next month.

In an earlier interview, Philippine Airlines Inc. president and chief operating officer Avelino Zapanta said having stopover rights to China would help boost local carriers' passenger traffic as well as revenues.

"We want them to remove requirement conditions so we can make a stopover from Shanghai to Beijing. There's a huge traffic in Shanghai, where there are a lot of business executives and tourists," he explained.

He said PAL would want to be allowed to carry traffic in Shanghai, then after three or four days, fly these same passengers to Beijing.

Cebu Pacific vice president for corporate planning and external affairs Peggy Wee said in a telephone interview that air talks with China in March 2 and 3 would deal more with additional rights than an increase in capacity entitlements.

She explained that the capacity entitlements under the existing air service agreement between the two countries were still sufficient at 5,000 seats apiece.

Local carriers are now using only 2,000 of these 5,000 seats granted under the agreement. PAL is currently the lone airline that has scheduled flights to China. Cebu Pacific flies to China only on a charter basis.

Manalac said in an earlier interview that the Philippines was keen on concerning a new deal with China because of the route's potential.

China, because of these new, made it to the Philippine negotiators' priority list of governments to forge bilateral agreements with.

However, talks with another big market, India, would have to be shelved as the Philippine air panel was currently preparing for a meeting on regional open skies with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Feb. 27 and 28.

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Brownouts on the horizon

THE HORIZON is plunged in darkness—literally. By 2007, brownouts will be hitting Luzon and there is little that can be done to prevent it. And the ultimate culprit wears [illegible] spectacles.

QUESTIONS OF POLICIES

Honcato C. Gemental

In order to ensure consumers of a steady and reliable supply of electricity, the generating capacity of the Luzon grid, or any grid for that matter, must be, at the very least, 20 percent in excess of peak demand. This excess capacity, or standby power, must be readily available to take care of any unscheduled outages. Civil society complained about this excess supply. Why are we paying for electricity not being generated, they reasoned.

Assuming a modest 3 percent annual increase in demand, Luzon's excess generating capacity now at about 40 percent of peak demand, will be down to the critical 20 percent by 2007. After 2007, the excess capacity will dip below the 20 percent threshold.

We will then have worse brownouts than those we had about a dozen years ago. This is because no new plants have been commissioned in the past few years and none is scheduled to be operational by 2007.

Visayas and Mindanao will be in a worse situation. Even now, these areas are already being hit by brownouts.

And so, if you still have your small potential buy one that you bought during the brownouts a dozen years ago, better be ready to dust it off soon. And you will need to keep those voltage regulators to your personal computers and other office machines and household appliances in good repair.

The Philippines is really pressed for time. Plans to give fossil plants are preferred because they generate cheaper electricity and we have the resources. But, from conception to commissioning, it takes about six years to put a gas-fired plant into operation.

The problem is worsened because the Philippines cannot get the funding for new plants, or attract independent power producers to jump in. This is due in what is called the regulatory risk, meaning the government keeps changing policies. It is also because there are fewer foreign players nowadays.

To make up for the drop in excess capacity, Napocor will probably put up diesel plants. These take only about three years to put up, but they are more expensive to run. The diesel plants now forming part of the Luzon grid are run as peak load plants, meaning they are run only during peak hours. But after 2007, diesel plants may have to be run for longer hours, which means everybody's electric bills.

Those civil society groups, who complained about high electric bills because they included the cost of power plants which not run, will have their wishes come true. There will be no more excess power supply. Instead, there will be brownouts, which should make civil society happy.

Prolonged brownouts always worry the industrious industry a lot of things—biz and economic investments only two—happen in the dark.

Finally, these brownouts will result in a higher birth rate, throwing economic planning out of the window.

Whatever will be our president next time, his/her first job will be to solve the looming power crisis. He/she will not have a moment to lose.

Global Holdings plans to go into iron ore exploration in RP

By Michelle V. Rono

GLOBAL Infrastructure Holdings Ltd. is considering venturing into iron ore exploration in the Philippines.

The move will complement its steel production business in the country, GHL earlier won the right over the assets of National Steel Corp. It had recently started rehabilitation work on NSC's plant in Iligan.

According to a government source, GHL wants to engage in an iron ore exploration project to ensure the availability of raw materials for NSC's operations. Iron ores are raw materials to steel manufacturing.

"GHL wants to see the prospects for iron ore. If they can source the products locally, it will help lower their competitiveness," said the source who requested anonymity.

He added that at least $1 billion would be needed to establish a bantas steel facility and another $50 million for exploration activities.

Currently, the country is importing iron ores from Australia and Brazil although reports said there are iron ores available in the mountains of Santa Maria in Laguna. The absence of investors willing to explore iron ore here forces the country to import.

The intention to go into exploration in the Philippines is part of the plan of the Alpat Group, the holding company of GHL, to increase its capacity of raw materials to around the world. Last year, Ispat has reportedly wanted a feasibility study on conducting iron ore exploration in India.

The rehabilitation of NSC formally began Feb. 1 after GHL, the winning bidder for the NSC, signed a memorandum of agreement with the steel firm's creditor banks. NSC shut down operations in 1999 due to debts amounting to P16 billion.

GHL committed to pay NSC's creditor banks P1.3.25 billion, of which P1 billion will be paid in cash and the balli will be paid over a period of eight years. The group of creditor banks is headed by the Development Bank of the Philippines, which has a majority stake in the NSC.

The reopening of the Iligan-based steel plant was hailed by the government as a big leap toward industrialization. The NSC is expected to contribute P4 billion to the country's gross domestic product and P1 billion to taxes in the national government.

Its reopening is also expected to boost Iligan City's economy as the NSC is projected to raise from P331 billion in taxes to the local government and to set to hire 4000 former employees of the NSC.

PSE ELECTIONS

Coyiuto seen challenging Arroyo camp

By Doris C. Dantiko

AFTER some-year hibernation, tycoon broker Ruben Coyiuto is again set to run for the chairmanship of the Philippine Stock Exchange.

Sources from the Coyiuto camp said on Friday that the former PSE chair would seek re-challenge incumbent chair Alma Alba Arroyo, who is expected to launch a reelection bid.

Sources said that among those supporting Coyiuto's bid were former PSE chairs Tilna Kalaw and Felipe Yap.

Other broker-nominees being considered to run under the Coyiuto ticket are all former PSE governors-directors—Ephraim Francisco, Eddie Cobing, Edwin Jay Fausto Chua, Ismael Uvat and Joey Roxas.

The group will also endorse as nine new independents or non-broker nominees—Omar Cruz formerly an executive of Citibank and publisher Napoleon Rama.

Coyiuto ran for the PSE chairmanship two years ago, but lost to arch-rival Vivian Yuchengco who was supported by the majority of the non-broker representatives. Under the Securities Regulation Code, at least eight out of the 15 member PSE board must be non-brokers.

Last year, both Coyiuto and Yuchengco did not run for office as part of a truce brokered by President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Coyiuto's camp—whose standard-bearer last year was Filomeno Francisco— pulled out of the elections over disagreements over the nomination of non-broker representatives. As such, the first annual meeting held by the PSE to elect its directors failed to form a quorum.

This year's annual PSE stockholders meeting will be held on March 15.

PSE posts ₱10M in net income

By Abigail L. Ho

THE PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange posted P10 million in net income last year, just about a third of what it earned the previous year, due to lower revenues from company listings.

PSE vice president for finance and corporate information Maurecio Tito said the bourse generated significantly less revenue in 2003 as there were only a handful of initial public offerings conducted last year.

In 2002, the PSE chalked up P28 million in net profit, 33 percent higher than the P18.3-million net income posted in 2001.

However, with the local bourse's dependence on listing fees for the bulk of its revenue, income fell drastically in 2002 as the volatile economic and political situation prevented companies from pursuing plans to offer a part of their shares to the public.

"For this year, we're very hopeful. We're hoping to increase our revenues," she told reporters.

At the start of the year, the PSE reinstituted transaction fees on call trades to help augment its waning revenue.

The transaction fees are expected to take in an additional P6 million to P12 million in annual revenue for the local bourse. This assumes an average daily market value of between P350 million and P500 million.

With the transaction fee in place, every P500 million in value turnover per day will mean an incremental income of P50,000 for the PSE.

The PSE is on its way to full demutualization from a cooperative to a stock corporation in an effort to beef up its business and make its shares more attractive to investors.

In line with this, the PSE last week completed the sale through private placement of more than 3.2 million new shares worth around P6.05 million or five institutional investors.

These investors include the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. Beneficial Trust Fund, San Miguel Corp. Retirement Fund and Government Service Insurance System, which bought 1.3 million shares, as well as Ellis Tay Investment Ltd. and Ali Syncpac Phi. Ltd., which bought more than 600,000 shares each.

PSE president Cayetano Paderanga Jr. said around P200 million of the proceeds would be invested in technology and another P200 million would be lost to the Clearing and Trade Guaranty Fund.

BIR's annual large taxpayers campaign starts

THE BUREAU of Internal Revenue (BIR) listed the country's top corporate taxpayers yesterday during the grand launching of the Large Taxpayers Service (LTS) Annual Taxpayers Campaign for 2004.

Revenue Commissioner Guillermo Parayno lauded these large companies for their prompt payment of taxes, adding that they had contributed 33 percent of the BIR's total revenue of P420.5 billion in 2003.

"The LTS accounts for at least half of the yearly revenue target of the BIR. Its collection in 2003 reached P221.9 billion, or at least 53 percent of our total collection amounting to P421.2 billion," Parayno said.

The top five companies are San Miguel Corp., Fortune Tobacco Corp., Petron Corp., Pilipinas Shell Corp. and Philip Morris (Philippines) Manufacturing Inc. (PMFM).

BIR statistics showed that SMC paid a total of P31.2 billion; Fortune, P13.7 billion; Petron, P9.6 billion and Philip Morris, P8.36 billion.

Quedancor gets credit lines

By Christina A. Gaplicas

COMMERCIAL banks led by Equitable-PCI Bank are set to open 40-billion credit lines worth P6.8 billion for Quedan Stand Credit and Guarantee Corp. (Quedancor).

The other participating banks are United Coconut Planters Bank, Philippine Veterans Bank and Land Bank of the Philippines.

The extension of credit line to Quedancor can be considered a form of compliance by the banks with the Agri-Agra Law.

Buying or investing in commercial papers issued by Quedancor whose business is engaged in agricultural production, processing, storage and marketing activities for small farmers, is another form of compliance with the Agri-Agra Law.

"The opening of the credit lines will allow more banks to flow into the agricultural sector," said Quedancor president Nelson Hamadher in an interview last week.

Of the total amount of credit lines, P2 billion will be opened by Equitable PCI Bank. However, Hamadher said details of the credit facility from Equitable PCI were still being finalized.

Quedancor posted a net income of P58 million last year, up by 100 percent from the previous year's P25 million.

The state-run agency's earnings grew as commercial banks entered more resources for the agency's re-lending. It registered an average repayment performance of 91 to 97 percent.

BIR January collection hits ₱35.6B

By Clarissa S. Bades

THE BUREAU of Internal Revenue collected P56.36 billion in taxes last month, P1.88 billion or 4.9 percent short of the P28.44-billion goal for January.

Preliminary data from the BIR, however, showed that last month's collection was 7 percent higher than the P54.17 billion collected in the same period last year.

Revenue Commissioner Guillermo Parayno Jr. said January is usually slow month for collections. In 2003, collections only started improving in April.

"We could be a bit short of the target but this is not worrisome because I revised that last year, we were substantially behind our goal and even knew compared to the previous year. And yet we met and even exceeded the full year target," said Parayno in an interview.

Although the economic team agreed to reduce the BIR's full-year collection goal to P393.3 billion from P388.6 billion, the BIR—next only to revenue in collection this year by about 12 percent from P421.3 billion last year.

The BIR said that excise taxes dropped during the month by about P1.5 billion, primarily due to lower collections from the oil industry.

The BIR said all its 19 regional offices registered an increase of about P2.5 billion or 17 percent.

"Like last year, the BIR expects to ramp this shortfall in the coming months as more revenue generating measures are being lined up and prepared for implementation," said Parayno.

The Bureau of Customs faced a little better, with its P6.295 billion in January collections considering the P6.3-billion goal for the month by 0.2 percent.

The Customs' income, however, was lower than the P9.826 billion collected last year.

The BOC wants to deliver P113.58 billion to state coffers this year. The economic team has revised the collection goal by about P5 billion after collections last year reached an all-time high of P106.856 billion.

Gov't planning another global bond issue

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE PHILIPPINES is planning to go back to the global bond market within the first quarter to raise part or all of its external financing requirement for the year worth $600 million.

"We are studying a new global bond issue. The longer the term, the better," said Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong.

Last Friday, the government raised $181 million from the sale of bonds falling due in 2011. It also swapped short-term and more expensive borrowings with $1.18 billion worth of new seven-year bonds.

Industry of the recent bond sale said the bonds generated in late 2003, the government was able to raise so far $1.17 billion of its $1.81 billion external financing requirement this year.

The finance chief pointed out that the first quarter was historically a good time to sell debt papers because the market was usually liquid. The Philippines is the largest Asian sovereign debt issuer outside of Japan.

"If it is favorable in the next term, then we will do it next, if not, we will likely do it after the elections," Amatong added.

Amatong said it had helped that the bond market had already discounted the downgrading of the country's credit rating by Moody's Investors Service last month and the Philippines' possible removal from the list of preferable investment area of California Employees' Retirement System or CalPERS.

The finance chief said the cost of the recent bond issue area reasonable considering the recent developments.

The $1.3 billion bond sale and swap extended the maturity of the country's foreign debt by 2.7 years, according to National Treasurer Sergio Edosa.

Answering said the successful bond sale reflected the continued confidence of investors in the Philippines.

"The also shows that the government's efforts in improving its liability profile are bearing fruit. All these efforts will strengthen the country's financial positions," said the finance chief.

The government said it had reduced the debt level in 2000 by $103 million, in 2001 by $252 million, in 2002 by $106 million and the remaining firmly bonds by $115 million.

At the same time, the country was able to redeem $28 million in UK insurance which backed the firmly bonds sold in the early '90s although long-term in nature, the firmly bonds were expensive because client required a collateral that allowed investors to terminate their placement any time.

SECURITY BANK'S SELLING AGENTS
Security Bank has signed up Banco de Oro Capital and Investment Corp., ING Bank NV and Multinational Investment Bancorporation as selling agents for its (P) 3-billion Tier 2 subordinated notes issuance. The offer was more than 100 percent oversubscribed.
(From left) Banco de Oro Capital and Investment Corp. EVP Eduardo P. Francisco, ING Bank NV managing director and head of financial markets Consuelo D. Garcia, Security Bank Corp. president and COO Alberto S. Villarosa and Multinational Investment Bancorporation president Cesar B. Cristi signed the agreement recently

Court order on mining seen driving away investments

By Michelle V. Reyno

THE JUDGMENT of Trade and Industry is worried that the recent court decision declaring the provisions of the Mining Act unconstitutional may discourage the entry of huge foreign investments into the mining industry.

Trade and Industry Secretary Cesar Purisima said he was hoping the Supreme Court would reverse its decision because of the billions of dollars worth of investments that the country might eventually lose if the ruling prevailed.

The mining industry earlier estimated that it might generate initial investments worth $4.5 billion once the issue on the legitimacy of mining operations of foreigners was addressed. The industry also said it could generate $2.5 billion in annual exports when the government's development agenda for the industry was fully operational.

The country currently ranks a measly 19th in mineral exports per year, which is significantly lower than the estimated $1.2 billion generated every year during the 1980s.

With the recent SC ruling, the industry is apprehensive it could hardly accomplish the growth projections they set earlier. Purisima, however, said there could still be a chance that the SC would reverse its decision, considering that the decision was not unanimous.

Stating R.A. 7942, the Supreme Court on Jan. 29 declared unconstitutional several provisions of the Republic Act No. 7942, also known as the Philippine Mining Act of 1995.

The decision meant that the granting of financial and technical service agreements (FTAAs), which allows foreign firms to conduct exploration and development of the country's minerals, was against the constitutional provision barring foreigners to own the country's natural resources.

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BUSINESS Monday

Business/Features Editor Margie Quimpo-Espino

Diving deep into aquaculture ventures

By Dennis M. Jerrys
Contributor

SMALL fishermen are catching less fish over the years, as coastal resources are getting depleted. A dour market more prone to gyres fish rather than look for them in the sea.

Pichetkilik can rise out of poverty and counter recession if they shift to aquaculture. Through aquaculture, they deal with the same product and work in the same environment, but enjoy greater yields.

Here are some options investors needed in a paper written by Wilfredo G. Yap for the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

Fish cages in the sea

The technology is not new. Milkfish (bangus) and rabbitfish (siganid) can be grown in fish cages.

A typical cage has a dimension of 10-15 meters and a depth of 3-5 meters. It can yield 30 to 40 metric tons of milkfish. It takes 120 to 150 days to grow them, and their feeds are largely sourced from soybeans.

"What's more, the milkfish produced, with an average body weight of 0.5 kilograms, are larger than those produced in inshore ponds," says Yap.

"Being reared purely on an artificial diet in oceanic waters, it also has no chance to develop an off-flavor and can therefore command a better price."

Grow fish with rice

There is much opportunity for growth in freshwater aquaculture. Rice farms, which total more than 3.5 million hectares, are suitable for growing fish.

The farmers can directly increase their income by engaging in fish-cum-rice culture. The practice will also enrich their families' protein intake.

Intensive attempts to popularize the shift had failed due to various reasons.

Irrigation did not supply enough water for the fields. The pesticides would poison the fish. There was a lack of fingerlings during the weeks they were most needed. And the short life-cycle of the rice did not give enough time for the fish to reach their best size.

The problems can be easily remedied. Fish-cum-rice cultivation should be limited to the areas where irrigation is reliable. The fish can be raised in a section separate from that of the rice. That is, the water flows in through the fish pond before it reaches the rice paddies.

Having a separate pond will also allow farmers to grow the fish independent from the rice.

Municipal mayors should put up nursery facilities for tilapia or carp fingerlings to increase the supply. The local governments will also do well to provide micro-financing for pond development.

Muscle up with mussels

Mussels and oysters can be grown at a very low cost, and the native has not even scratched the surface of this industry. Less than a tenth of the hectares suited for mussel and oyster farming are actually used.

Growing these shellfish does not require much capital or high level skills. It is a labor-intensive activity that can provide supplemental income for the rural poor. The products can also be processed for export. Because they are cheap, they can even be consumed here. And the consumers like mud crabs, lobsters and groupers.

The real problem with shellfish farming is the red tide phenomenon. When the algae bloom and are consumed by the clams, the latter can induce poisoning among humans. The algae do not actually harm the shellfish nor cause its growth.

"Thus, the red tide blooms disappear. It does not take long for the mussels and oysters to become fit for human consumption," says Yap. "With a vigilant red tide monitoring and warning system in place, the red tide bane can be greatly minimized."

In fact the red tide phase already benefits the shellfish since to eat-ships and grow. Entrepreneurs do not lose money; they only have to wait for the red tide episode to end. It is more a cash flow problem. So the trick is to grow mussels and oysters so as additional source of income.

Crack the market with crabs

Mud crabs can be grown in mangrove areas without any damage to the environment. Pens made of bamboo sticks are installed between the trees. They are lined with coarse nets, and are covered with plastic sheets. The nets and the plastic are needed to prevent the crabs from escaping.

During low tide, the crabs take refuge in shallow ditches. The crabs, stocked at one crab per square meter, eat the pest golden snail.

Just a hectare of these mangrove pens yields as much as 1,600 kilos of crabs. The simple technology does not involve cutting down any more mangroves—most of the mangroves forests have already been depleted. Entrepreneurs can easily instruct themselves of the technology to produce mud crab sandwich.

Now, if only entrepreneurs get a little more crab mentality... Comments to dennisjr@philonline.com.

Technology out of necessity

By Salvador I. Silbayan
Contributor, UP Institute for Small-Scale Industries

IF YOU'RE a small businessman and you're still running the temptations (and expenses) of intermittent and computer-related sagas, listen to the story of Imelda, an accounting executive who is now in business for herself.

Retrenched at 26 and suddenly a homemaker with two kids, she felt disoriented.

"I tried to look for a job at my age," recalls this CPA who used to head an accounting department of 50 people. "Where I did, one of the first companies that showed interest in me was a company operating a chain of hotels. Although the position and compensation were good, I had to turn it down. I just couldn't accept being part of that business."

The next prospective job looked promising. But the manager told her: "You have good credentials, but you don't know Lotus 1-2-3." That was it. She told her husband she had to learn to use electronic spreadsheets.

"She rather than spend money on a seminar, my husband suggested we use the money on a computer and a dot matrix printer and learn on my own. And I did, initially Wordstar, and later on Lotus...with my husband filling me in on the finer points."

It was her husband who exhorted her to list first client, a publishing house that needed accounting systems and procedures. That was followed by others, one selling automotive parts, another in vegetable trading and trucking and still another providing layouts in advertising composition.

There put an end to her job hunting and started her on freelancing as a CPA, with her own small firm.

When one of her clients complained that he couldn't get in touch with her he gave him a beeper, charged against her monthly retainer. But she couldn't secure the cell, especially when she was on the road. So when the rates of cell phones became affordable, she got one.

And when clients needed to send documents, she had to get a fax machine. She thought that was the end of it. But when they had to correspond by e-mail, she had to get an Internet connection.

All the while, clients would come and go, ranging from rich to medium, from a few employees to a hundred. Some were in services, others in trading, and a few in manufacturing. She would replace her dot matrix with bubble jet and laser printers, Wordstar with Word, and Lotus 1-2-3 with Excel.

Now readily accessible by phone, cell phone, fax, and e-mail, friendships found her clientele growing. Soon, she was hiring accounting clerks on a project basis. This required buying additional computers. And, she finds the audit season (particularly rough.

Did she have a long-term plan for all these? No. But she had set some rules at the start. She wouldn't do any bookkeeping work. She made sure that in any audit or tax engagement she could satisfy client requirements for possible repeat business or referrals.

She continues to attend tax and accounting seminars to keep abreast of developments. To avoid paying office rent, she still operates from the house as she has done for the past 17 years.

(Check out upcoming small business courses of the U.P. Institute for Small-Scale Industries: Programmable Logic Controller, Feb. 23; Strategic Marketing, Feb. 25; Improve Your Business, Feb. 26; Manager's Course, March 1)

GROWING YOUR BUSINESS

LIFESTYLE

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SINGER Anna Fuji

R&B star Luke Mijares

COMPOSER Fr. Manuel Maramba, OSB

CONDUCTOR Gerard Salonga

Month of love, month of arts

SOPRANO Rachelle Gonzales

TENOR Jose Randy Gibengo

The Pasig Music Festival, the Bamboo Organ Festival and the Philharmonic in Jeans are just some of the musical events of the National Arts Month

By Amadis Ma. Guerrero
Cum laude

BON FETE de St. Valentine! As the French would say. February is the month of love, with all its hype, but it is also the month of the arts. Specifically, National Arts Month. And there are celebrations and performances from North to South.

In Metro Manila, the festivities are being spearheaded by the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), with the latter about to launch the year-long hype on CCP 100M theater festival on Feb. 19.

At Metrö's Bar Bleues on Feb. 20, classical music again reared its lovely head with opera and Broadway excerpts from The Three Tenors-and-One Soprano: Lamuel de la Cruz, Nelyn Caballero, Ramon Acuyong and the attractive Rachelle Gonzales. Young Bernie Cu Unjieng (soprano and pianist Mary Anne Ignacio also performed).

The fun-fetes is managed by the popular couple Herbert and Bomet Mork.

On Feb. 29, an Arte Congreve will be held at the Folk Arts Theater (Tanghalang Francisco Balagtas) during which the presidential candidates will be ousted, and asked to present their platforms for art and culture. If any, one might add. Incidentally, the artists' sector has a potential voting power of two million. But how united the sector really is, is another matter altogether.

The 3rd Pasig Summer Music Fest, at the Pasig Museum, started early this year (Feb. 8), with baritone Noel Arana, a member of the acclaimed UST (University of Santo Tomas) Singers, sharing honors with tenor Randy Gibengo and soprano Sharon Vinoya, and pianist Ruth Ismail.

Succeeding favorites (5 p.m.) will feature the remarkable young violinist Jomie Ineza with pianist J. Greg Tantoco and flutist Ma. Mia Shie with pianist Mary Anne Ignacio.

The First-ever International Bandolla Festival (Carolina cola Engalleon, Blood for Bishops of Unity) was held in Real Boco country Naga City, and Legaspi City Feb. 8-14. But why in Bicol? Because the region is rich in the bandolla traditions. Fortunately, the bandolla groups will also perform at the CCP on Feb. 17.

The participating groups came from Mexico, US, Spain, Sweden, Israel and host Philippines.

The bandolla has been in the Philippines for five centuries now, said musicologist Lt. Irene de la Peña in a press conference at Bantay's Restaurant in Intramuros. "But for a long time napabayaan (it was neglected) and so we had the more 'chic' and less expensive ukulele," he said. "Everybody was trying to come up with a Philippine Madrigal-like group, which would win honors abroad."

Nevertheless, the bandolla has always been with us, and now it is experiencing a resurgence here and abroad. "At the end of the 20th century," de la Peña pointed out, "we had the beginnings of a renaissance in the bandolla. Our groups have experiment with repertoire and techniques, while those abroad are traditional."

Composer Ramon S. Tuason noted that "I have experimented with and explored the different sounds that bandolla can produce. So now we have some very fresh music, new compositions, new sounds, new techniques."

Tuason described the bandolla as "a universal treasure that connects us to the rest of the world. It is a primary emblem of the Filipino national heritage. It is as Filipino as the Rizzing Tagalog, adobo and arnibalos."

Bamboo organ festival

Yet another international fest, the durable International Bamboo Organ Festival—now on its 16th year—will be staged at the Las Piñas church from Feb. 27 to March 5. This is an annual event of the Bamboo Organ Foundation, Inc., with Orlla Gandara Reta as executive director.

Except for Belgian tenor Bartholomeus de Angel, all the performers will be Filipinos. These include the UST Esalen Ensemble, singer Rachelle Gonzales, female Gilbengo, Janet Atacania, Andrew Hernando and Raja Alejandro; pianist Nena Villanueva, violinist Oscar Tatcs, and composer H. Manuel Maramba (who will play his new composition "Improvisation (2004)" on the organ.

On Jennifer Pascual, a New York-based organist who is from Las Piñas, will also perform. Choice festivals the Aurora Chamber Singers and the Las Piñas Boys Choir, directed by organist Amando Sabaya.

In a chat with this writer during the media briefing at Sill Restaurante Restaurant, Bernardine Ortiz, Magi Alino Aguacia, parish priest of the Las Piñas church, said the famous bamboo organ now sounds more mellow. "It can still be used for concerts ("puede pa rin para sa concert"), but the sound has to be improved, and it will be totally rehabilitated after the festival," he added. And Filipino manpower will do the job.

Classical talents will dovetail with pop singers in the innovative "The Best of Philharmonic in Jeans" on Feb. 21 at the Dulcesa Lite Theater on UN Avenue. This combination of "orchestra and rock-and-roll" brings to a close the six-month concert series of the Manila Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO), led by Rudel Colmenar.

Performers are vocal Nelyn Caballero, an Aliw Awardee; pop diva Anna Fuji, R&B star Luke Mijares, Jeri Pangan of The Daars, and resident conductor Gerard Salonga.

Alice Ballet Philippines' "Neo-Filipino," the ballet pendulum swings back to the classical school at Star Theater on Feb. 20, when Lisa Macuja-Elizalde and Gelo Barrera celebrate 30 years of dance partnership with the soaring "Don Quixote."

This is going to be a lively and interesting month for the performing arts.

UST Guitar Ensemble

Flamin' fun and energy

By E. C. Pertierra
Contributor

A QUEST FOR FAME. Helen Galiaza, Maclove Serra, Nicole Santiago, Ralion Abarca, Charlie Barredo, Arnel Carrion, Ri Tarlac, Cathee Los Rodriguez

BEAT. Eguerra, Aing Antonio, Arnel Rosal, Danielle Barredo...Resparo Soteroteo, Angelo Paragoso, Oliver Union

R!'s current production of "Fame," an adaptation of the iconic 1980s hit flick, not only breathes a much-needed youthful exuberance in the Philippine stage, it does so with wholesome fun for everyone, and to show stopping style at that.

In particular, what's hot about this show are the great songs and the full choreography.

The songs are, in general, much more than simply hip. And the choreography, by dance maestro Jaime del Prado, captures the tenseness of the play's cutest inertia—the talents and triumphs of young artists...with a severe and eloquent clarity will make you want to dance in the theater aisles.

The play's very first song, "Way That I Make It A," sung while the members of the ensemble are waiting to find out if they have been accepted into the Fame School of Performing Arts, will immediately hook you with its infectious, mesmerizing concoction of innocence, love and hope.

Two other songs—"I Want To Make Magic" and "Let's Play A Love Scene"—remind us of that ancient mystery: why being in love, especially for the first time, will always be a magical, memorable time.

Former Repertory personalities Topper Sylvegue and Shiela Valdecerosa played the lovers. Sylvegue performed with Broadway confidence and precision, while Valdecerosa sang with delightful delicacy. They were amazingly lovely to watch, and we felt like we were really in New York City watching them live.

Another notable actor was Angelo Bersamin, who is performing in his first big play but is a veteran of European tours of "Miss Saigon" and, yes, "Fame." Playing a unruly music student, he sings "Being On Television" with gentle bravura and charming skill.

For more singing standout is rookie Aing Antonio. She plays a dancer with big hips and big arms and big legs, too. However, her talent's voice is also big and beautiful and full of promise. She has just one solo number,

DANCE maestro Jaime del Prado

With 'Fame, The Musical,' Repertory Philippines once more gives us a rousing time at the theater

"Mabel's Prayer," but it's a show stopper.

No unnecessary movements

Nevertheless, what truly makes this show rock is the dancing. Del Prado seems to have had the time of his life choreographing "Fame." As all times, you know where to look onstage. Your eyes are never confused, and no movement is unnecessary.

Leading the energetic dancing is Ralion Abarca, TV star and comedy/acting flop actor, and Cathee Rodriguez, an acclaimed Philippine ballet Theater dancer doing musical theater for the first time.

Abarca plays the passionate black dancer Tyrone, while Rodriguez essays his inner controlled white ballerina girlfriend. Rodriguez's powerful grace and Abarca's basically groovy moves lend an unusual fire to their scenes together.

Supporting the lead dancers and singing are their multi-talented ensemble as well as other actors of this ensemble play roles seem to be simply enjoying themselves onstage.

Take note of Danielle Barredo, Arnjanie Hernandez, Charlie Barredo, Grael Cruzmelo, Melissa Ramos, Chi-ngel Rosal, Arnel Carrion, Lorena Martinez, Ana Abad Santos, Bitong, Oliver Union, Nicole Santiago, Helen Galiaza and Ri Tarlac, himself a graduate of a similar Performance Arts School in Hong Kong and a former member of Ballet Philippines. Remembrance and the Geo Giordano Jazz Company of Chicago.

The musical is, in all respects, superior to the movie. Director Baby Barredo has succeeded in giving us a meaningful and enjoyable inside look at the fairy-better struggles of emerging artists, as well as another great time at the theater.

"Fame" runs until March 13 in Rep's Globe Theatre at Greenhills in Greenhill 1, Mandaluyong. Call 6819718, e-mail repphilippines.com or visit www.repphilippines.com

DANCE maestro Jaime del Prado

New dance school opens in Cubao

VERECA Dandoll, a studio set up by Virginia "Tze" Lagdo-Bore, a former member of the Bayanihan Dance Company of the Philippines and Pacific Cultural Dance Company, with Katerina Samson-Mercado, former lead dancer of the Philippine Ballet Theater, opened recently.

The dance school, at the ground floor of the AMO Bldg., 92 New York St., Quezon City, offers classes in classical and modern ballet, hook dance, body conditioning and street grooves.

It will also have special classes in flamenco, Polynesian and other dances soon.

Bore said a teacher and an audience would handle a class of 15-20.

The school has professionally built dance flooring, air-conditioning, dressing room and waiting area for parents or guardians.

Its school director, Mercado said they would use the Australian Conservatory of Ballet program, which is based on the Royal Academy Method of Classical Ballet.

Classes for adults will have no age limit. The "Baby Ballet" sessions for kids will accept students from 3-10.

Call 9124202/ 9126781/ 9937161.

Macuja and Barroso celebrate 16 years of dance partnership

LISA Macuja-Elizalde and Orlando Barroso celebrate the 16th anniversary of their dance partnership with the full-length ballet "Don Quixote" at Star Theater on Feb. 20-21 and Feb. 27-29.

Dancing the demanding roles of Kitri and Basilio are ballet friends soloists Amalea Lynn Huang, Marion Faustino, Arnaiz Espejo and Gerardo Francisco.

"Odile and I first danced together in Les Sylphides in 1988," Macuja-Elizalde said. "Since then, we have danced some 120 full-length ballets

GRACE Barroso and Lisa Macuja-Elizalde as Basilio and Kitri in "Don Quixote"

in 40 cities all over the world. In fact, our first performance of 'Don Quixote' together was in Krasnoyarsk, Russia, in 1992."

Barroso is ballet master and premiere danseur. Macuja-Elizalde is artistic director.

"Don Quixote" marks Ballet Manila's 16th year. Although named after Miguel de Cervantes' lovable but misdirected knight, the ballet centers around the romance of Kitri, the innkeeper's daughter, and the handsome barber, the village barber.

The three-act ballet features some of the most fiery and difficult ballet steps required dancing in the classical ballet repertoire. Choreography is by Alexander Gorsky and music by Ludwig Minkus.

Call 9088102, 4003886 or 5205967.

DANCE Bit, Marion Faustino and Gerardo Quiros

2nd week winners of Dionatext contest

FERDINAND Bajado of Mercantayan, Bulacan, and Gregorio Bonifilo of Bangkal, Makati, were chosen as the Textbloksters ng Lingga for the second week of the Dionatext Poetry Writing Contest. They will receive P5,000 each.

Consolation prize winners were Rubenia Sáiree of Pembiquan City, Fernando Gonzalez of Las Piñas City, Myrna Collantes Gonzales of Makati City, and Fidry Alimoseno of Pasig City, as well as Emma Escobar of Cavite City, Brenda Lubanco of Cadiz City, Tyrone Jay Amadeo of Cagayan de Oro City and Ernesto Valerio of Davao City. They will receive P2,000 each.

Dionatext is sponsored by The National Commission for Culture and the Arts in cooperation with the Filipino Institute of Translation Inc., Linguang nga Mamamalat sa Pilipinas and the Unibersidad of Cordoba Writing.

The contest's theme is poetry composed of short versified rhyming lines. Each line consists of seven syllables expressing a complete thought. Entries must be written in Filipino and must express love within the family. Contestants must submit their entries through text to 0907-4640434 or 0918-2222218.

Each week's topic is announced by the name and address of the author. Entries must be received not later than 5 p.m. every Friday of the contest week. Call 9225830.

The winning stanza:

Ilang ani kinatiwalag,
Ang magsasaka'y nagtipon,
Ikot ng kuliglig, sumabay
Sa pagsayaw ng mga palay.
—Ferdinand Bajado

Lolo, wag malulungkot,
Sipagang angod ngani,
Ako po'y iiyong tatgbuk
—Gregorio M. Bonifilo

2004 NATIONAL ARTS MONTH

This week across the nation

16 Mon

CINEMA PARADISO 2. NCCA Sangguniang Lasallian Lecture. Screening of "Memories of The Lion" (1981). UP Filipino) starring Dolphy. 6 p.m. Admission free.

KULTURANG PAMANA. Parade, Sala, Awit at Sine Pa, 9 a.m., Pabalikbalik University of the Philippines (PUP), Pateros/Pilipino, 2 p.m. PUP Main Library.

EKSENA CHAPEL LA. Intramurals. Up to Feb. 25. An NCR-wide theater festival and competition among high school and college theater groups. Organized by the Asian Theater Ensemble Inc.

SILAY AMONG 5. Pasig City Poetry com performance hour by poets of Western Visayas. Organized by the Hanggas Literary Arts Center.

17 Tues

CINEMA PARADISO 2. NCCA Sangguniang Lasallian Lecture. Screening of "Sing Sang Kong/Sig-Sag" (1961). Sampaguita) starring Rogelio dela Rosa and Carmen Rodriguez.

DIWATA 2003. National Tour. Cultural Center of the Philippines, 8 p.m., and exhibit opening, 3 p.m. Free admission.

KULTURANG PAMANA. Parade, Sala, Awit at Sine Pa, Ma-ARALING LIBI, 2:30 p.m., Intramuros/Binondo. PUP

MUSIKO Sa MUSEO. Rizal, Summer City Gym, Malate, Roxas Edja. Professor (Fabian de Ocampo) Recital. Free admission.

18 Wed

CINEMA PARADISO 2. NCCA Sangguniang Lasallian Lecture. Screening of "Hanggang Saan" (1980). Sampaguita) starring Amalia Fuentes and Romeo Vasquez.

19 Thurs

CINEMA PARADISO 2. NCCA Sangguniang Lasallian Lecture. Screening of "Anonang" (1961-1990) starring Nestor de Villa and Bella Rosa. Directed by F. E. Constantino.

KULTURANG PAMANA. Parade, Sala, Awit at Sine Pa, Mendiola ng Libi, 2:30 p.m., Intramuros/Binondo. PUP

MUSIKO Sa MUSEO. Rizal, Summer City Gym, Malate, Roxas Edja. Professor (Fabian Lakas ng Kalawan at Gigilong Ko Indiano). Organized by the City Government of the Science City of Muñoz.

DILA-MABUHAY 5. Nueva City Poetry com performance hour by poets of Western Visayas.

20 Fri

CINEMA PARADISO 2. NCCA Sangguniang Lasallian Lecture. Screening of "Pinilakat ng My Love" (1982). Sampaguita) starring Eddie Gutierrez and Susan Roces. Directed by Luciano B. Carlos.

21 Sat

CINEMA PARADISO 2. NCCA Sangguniang Lasallian Lecture. Screening of "Ibulong Mo Sa Diyos" (1988). Sampaguita) starring Eddie Gutierrez and Susan Roces. Directed by Luciano B. Carlos.

22 Sun

PELIKULA AT LIPUNAN. SM Nobi. 11 a.m., screen-oriented shorts; 1:30 p.m., "Bulig-mahuni" by Jun Red, 4 p.m., "Abot-kaya Version" by Ron Dominguez; 6:30 p.m., Sanggo shorts; and 8 p.m., "Sampu-Sigma" by Peque Gallaga.

KULTURANG PAMANA. Parade, Sala, Awit at Sine Pa, Literatorang Filipino, 2 p.m., Kalayaang Rotunda, PUP. Poetry reading.

DIWANG PINOY 2004 Orchestral Concert by Dewani Machine Orchestra, Manila City, Up to Feb. 29. Bamboo orchestra of five community concerts featuring the Metro Manila Community Orchestra. Organized by the Institute for Orchestral Development in the Philippines.

PELIKULA AT LIPUNAN. SM Nobi. 11 a.m., screen-oriented shorts; 1:30 p.m., "Bulig-mahuni" by Jun Red, 4 p.m., "Abot-kaya Version" by Ron Dominguez; 6:30 p.m., Sanggo shorts; and 8 p.m., "Sampu-Sigma" by Peque Gallaga.

23 Mon

PELIKULA AT LIPUNAN. SM Nobi. 11 a.m., screen-oriented shorts; 1:30 p.m., Sanggo shorts; 4 p.m., "Bulig-Sinsal Hanap" by Jun Red; 6:30 p.m., "Sala sa Init" by Pedro Bimondoc; 8 p.m., "The Magdalena Sisters" by Ilmar Gallaga.

Advertisement

LIFESTYLE

HOLIDAY ARTS

(TOP) Various items from Miniatures. (Left) Showing off our items, with Marites and Belinda

Mats of our lives

ALLAART

Alma Anchal Jr.

NOEL, at the beauty salon I happened to overhear that I was going to write an article on the living. You cannot imagine the enthusiasm response! People kept on popping into my cubicle to talk to me! I had a hard time concentrating on my computer!

Most of the stories involved childhood memories of sleeping on mats, under the watchful gaze of doting parents. Somehow banig really evoked that security of home. Many people actually expressed delighted surprise that I would be interested in banig.

Other different wouldn't have cared. But the fact were: The finished banig fell into distinct where an enthusiasm were introduced since something warmer like memories were needed. When you think about it, banig also came from an era where domestic space, even in the largest houses, was organized differently.

Today, when we visit homes built in the 19th century, we are often surprised that there were so few bedrooms. I suspect this was because in the past people didn't have separate bedrooms with individual beds. They simply laid out their banig at night and then rolled them up again during the day. There were even special racks for storing them along with blankets and pillows.

Evidently people had different customs of putting their banig away, for members of different families have exhibited several.

Folklorists will tell you that the custom of unrolling banig for the night and then putting them away by inserting poor tao in a riddle, which goes something like this:

Pag nanganak ng kambing
Pag gabing ikaw
Ito ang unang sabihin
Ito ngit, o ito po nino?

From this, one can gauge how images of banig are very much intertwined with our culture.

Of course, we are all aware that one of the most memorable short stories by National Artist Francisco Arcellana is titled "The Mats." My friends cannot forget the moment when the father reveals the mats with the names of two children who have died, indicating that though they are gone they are not forgotten. The story has been issued as a lovely illustrated book.

One of the expressions I find especially sexy is "habulgan ito ng kulit." I mean, now that's a thought to relish! The English translation is somewhat awkward: "I will cover you with a mat of kisses." But I'm sure you get the picture. (And you should be warned if provoked!)

Interestingly, I can't think of the English term for those squares of foil in which tablets of medicine are collected. For Filipinos it is ubiquitous—all have no problem. Yes, you guess it... we call them banig!

Jewels and colors

Recently overseas who works with me, Linda la Nasa, visited her mother in Mindanao and came back with banig. I was truly amazed when I first unwrapped them. It was like my apartment floor was suddenly paved with jewels! What colors!

A friend of mine, Joel Mercado, kindly offered to send me more mats from the Candaraspo area. I'm so excited to see them! I'm hoping they will include the famous mat from Lambunao, which is among my country's best.

In a recent article, David Stevens describes a whole range of banig—from all over the Philippines. He talks about the fabulous mats from Iloilo and Basilan. He also discusses the banig of the

PHOTO ICO

Painting as private theater

"UNTITLED" 6

By Cassandra C. Tejero

All true, the past surfaced art inherited from or inspired by the works of primitives, small children, prisoners and psychotics, still baffles local gallery goers although the movement was inaugurated about half a century ago.

It started in the mid-1940s when Jean Dubuffet began collecting artworks that were "free from cultural norms," mostly those produced by patients in psychiatric hospitals.

A showcase of this kind of art is Ruth Ortiz's "When You Lose, Don't Lose the Lesson," 15 pieces in mixed media, on view today in Galleria Duranta at the Ayala Ave. Wing, 300 Benpacasil, Rhodes Jaya (D.).

Here is the artist's energy channeled through short strokes and scratches, loops and slashes, drips and doodles, scribble and scribble, with acrylic, colored pencil, charcoal, graphite, oil, on canvas or paper.

Beautifully fine lines produce the illusion of crayolery, while the abrupt bold strokes recall the technique of Van Gogh. All lines are used by Ortiz, which he applies either in parted tone or tone.

Most of the pieces border between figural painting and abstraction. Typical of this crossover is "Untitled" 6, where a black ball-point pen drawing of a stick figure on a steno-pad sheet is collaged amid the frenetic abstractions of turquoise, lime, red, cobalt, silver.

The viewer can also discern the artist's favorite organic basis, particularly in "Untitled" 1-3. This resembles form, says the artist, is irreplaceable, as it just comes out of his being.

"But do I need don't you—emotional, or not-important," he says. "Later, somewhere you."

That is not to say, as the artist himself affirms: "I look at every piece as a statement of strong—young inside—not thrusheleton to long earth for, I put work and work and sometimes the brush and paint don't exist."

Intense drawings

Studying at the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts, Ortiz was mentored by National Artist Jose Joya, a pioneer of Philippine abstraction. He associated with Antonio Dayrit, Hector Hallare, Leo Grandea, Boy Vencencio.

Artists, he says, he always admires nobody. Dubuffet, of course, and fascinat artist-quirky sculptor Josef Beuys, graffiti artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, All-over painter Cy Twombly, Bernardo Pereyang, Juan el. Antonio, Roberto Chabet, Corey Tee, Nilo Parlo.

"Lahat nila, by him and person, make influence or advise," he says. "Hindi lang sa work. Yung real-buhay sa tao."

He sees a Spanish-Art expressionism in the '50s, gaining a reputation with his "Serpent Series," until he moved toward abstraction in the '80s.

"I used to do very intense drawings," he recalls. "In first stage, nakakadi ang pencil. Nd ang pa-back and reflect on the paper, then-erasure to it, reflect some more—dumagong pangdi-tang pamula ang pagka-graphite ng figures."

Shaped canvases

Nowadays visual idioms in the use of shaped canvases and unconventional formats, as popularized by the Neo-Hanoverly Abstractionists. Is it just whimsy, or does the shape of the canvas really affect the content of the painting?

"I think the experience is different," he explains. In painting, the content may remain the same in any format but the way your hand-it is wouldn't be the same if it's contained in a square or an oblong.

"WINDOW"

"CLOCK"

His years the former springs from the content of the pieces itself, in this connection some of the artworks being the container of the artist's thoughts and emotions.

"Window" has part of its canvas shaped through to form a rectangular opening, thus merging into the artwork this simply wall behind. "Uneven Lines," with its canvas attached with scraps, takes on the shape of a TV set, cabinet or entertainment-oven.

The paintoid object "Clock" is not really new, as it was displayed in department stores a millennial in a few years ago.

"I need to think, I wish that painting were protecting, or recoding, or going out of the format," he says. "Now it has become a wall-ty."

In any case, the viewer is not encouraged to make any highfalutin interpretations of these works. It's just channeled energy.

This is private domain. You are entering the theater of the subconscious. If you see actual implications or theological matters—good for you.

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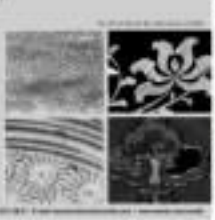

Mats of our lives

Maybe the familiar mats of dolls, the frontline mats with their delicate lace-like edges. But most famous of these would be those from the town of Basay in Negros. These iconic in fantastic floral designs. Sometimes they even featured narratives across like scenes of a San Juanico bridge or maps of the Philippines.

I recently had a fun experience with mats.

It started with the plastic going off at 9 a.m. We were heading off to explore the towns on the eastern slopes of the great holy mountain Banahaw, bubbling up with excitement. I immediately questioned my newfound enthusiasm for rediscovering our country.

I like to say that love of country comes from seeing its beauty unfold through our eyes and minds. We believe we, our conditions tend to reserve when you have to get up so early!

The day proved worth our interrupted slumber. We saw quiet mountain towns nestled in Banahaw's bosom.

We were shopping for slippers in Lilac. We got to taste tamales and other delicacies, ending with a delicious bunch of pinatong tapioca. This was a (most fantastic delightful) cafe in Sagpungan. Topping our meal was a delectable kalo kalo!

Surprise

The best part of our Batadaan trip, though, was our visit to the town of Majayjay in Laguna. Here we saw what scholar Chito Santiago has dubbed the oldest family residential house in the Philippines—dating to the middle of the 16th century! After our meals a courtesy call on Mayor Victorino Bonifilio, our guide took us to see the real stakes. Just the impression that he was minister of the mass house.

After asking around, we were ushered into the home of Norma Feliciano, the descendant of some mats that she said her friend, Imelda Dublin, had embroidered.

When I opened up the first one I saw my name embroidered in bright pink letters. I thought it was a name-tagging contraption!

However, when my own parents Ollie (attached another) mat embroidered with "Imelda" and "Ollie," we all knew that something was up. Obviously our guide had jumped everything the work before! Imagine our very own personalized hang...lots of Batadaan to take home. What a treat!

Our second little but addictive thrill episodic mats from Majayjay. They are woven from pandan which grows on Batadaan's slopes. We were even shown the finger protectors used to flatten the pandan strips. These pictures were fashioned from huge cylinders of mats.

The mats were then decorated with fascinating designs. We met local a border incorporating designs that resembled trips, boats, the mats, tr-mandaguit. The decorations were done by basketweaving-like strips which.

The hemp are truly mainly our lives. My friend Ollie tells me her son Jamie loves the hang she bought home. He loves it when reading.

It seems my heart is so many designers use mats as innovative ways. I've seen hang used as carpets, I've seen hang-covered throw pillows and wastebaskets. I think the items are wonderful ways to get in touch with our culture, with our traditions.

Every time we stick into a hang mats, we are actually entering to a place filled with the skills of many hands, the memories of home and the riddles of our childhood. Isn't it wonderful to surround ourselves again with our childhood skills?

For questions and comments, e-mail lourdesg@gmail.com or address letter to Filipino Heritage Library, Makati Ave., Ayala Triangle, Makati City.

ARMCHAIR by Imeldah

ALASKA

Alaska Milk Corp. Unaudited Net Income Up 14% to P 499M

Alaska Milk Corporation (AMC) reported a net income of P 499 million in 2003, up P68 million or 14% compared to P439 million in 2002.

Revenues reached P4.34 billion, 9% higher than the P3.97 billion in 2002. Higher sales volume across all product lines pushed revenue growth during the year. Liquid canned milk sales volume expanded at nearly double-digit rate, helping to expand market share in the category. In the meantime, the condensed filled milk business continued to enjoy brisk sales.

The Alaska powdered filled milk business likewise maintained its growth momentum notwithstanding the continued contraction of the powdered milk market. The newly launched powdered high calcium milk product likewise contributed to the growth of the total powdered milk business. Meantime, the Alaska Fresh and Alaska Slim in 1-liter UHT packs continued to post double-digit volume growth while newly launched Alaska Creama All-Purpose Cream has been well-received in the market, making additional volume contribution to total UHT sales.

Skimmed milk powder (SMP) prices continued on an upward trend for most of 2003 and peaked at US$1,800 to US$1,900 per MT by the fourth quarter. SMP prices are expected to remain at these high levels at least through the first half of 2004 and compounded with higher foreign exchange cost is anticipated to weigh heavily on AMC's profit margins in 2004.

AMC share price performed strongly in 2003, gaining 47% since the beginning of the year. Share price return is further enhanced by a dividend yield of nearly 10% per annum, with the company's declaration of a P 0.30 / share cash dividend announced during the annual stockholders' meeting in May 2003.

AMC's balance sheet remains very strong , with a cash position of P 1.9 billion as of December 31, 2003.

AMC is one of the leading manufacturers of liquid canned milk, powdered filled milk and UHT ready-to-drink milk products in the Philippines.